

7/26/2018

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SPECTATOR

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—April 16, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 1

TWELFTH BIRTHDAY NUMBER

Articles By

Dudley Nichols

Roy del Ruth

Kenneth Thompson

Howard Estabrook

Wesley Ruggles

Scoop Conlon

Bruno Ussher

Mabel Keefer



NURSE FROM BROOKLYN

★

OVER THE WALL

★

GO CHASE YOURSELF

TO THE VICTOR

★

BAR 20 JUSTICE

★

UNDER WESTERN STARS

ONLY PUBLICATION IN THE WORLD DEVOTED
EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM

**OUR
VERY BEST WISHES
AND
HAPPIEST RETURNS
OF THE DAY**



**CEDRIC GIBBONS
DOLORES DEL RIO**

MERVYN LE ROY
PRODUCTIONS

*W*ishing the Spectator
many more years of its valuable
service to motion pictures.

TAY GARNETT



EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

WHY SPECTATOR WAS BORN . . .

WHEN a dozen years ago I decided to start a publication, I did not have in mind the uplift of screen art as an aid to screen business, or any other idea, altruistic or financial, in as far as the paper itself was concerned. I merely wanted to advertise myself into a good job in a studio. That end attained, I was going to scrap the publishing business and spend my working hours in a studio office and my leisure paddling about in a swimming pool. With such a highly desirable objective before me, I did not wish the winding-up of the business to be complicated by a paid-up list of subscribers, consequently I made no effort to secure any. But they came, and by the time the first job was offered, it was not sufficiently robust in a financial way to cover with promptness the expense of making to subscribers the rebates called for by the unearned portions of their subscription list periods. By the time a bigger and better job was offered, the subscription list had advanced to the point of sustaining the ratio of rebate demands to the amount of the proffered pay.

Deadline for Subscribers . . .

BY THAT time also I was beginning to enjoy myself in the combination role of editor and publisher. The business was carrying itself and I was learning rapidly that I did not know a blessed thing about pictures as an art or as an industry. That made me want to know, and I decided to stick to the publishing business until I really knew something about the picture business and ceased being astonished perpetually by the manner in which it was being conducted by those who controlled it. I am still in that phase of my campaign for a studio job, and feel that by the spring—or the fall, at the latest—of 1966 I will have emerged far enough from my state of bewilderment to accept the then existing conditions as rational, and with a conscience rendered pliable by a half-century of pounding, can pledge anew my faith in picture practices every time I draw my weekly studio pay check. I therefore wish to announce now that no advance payment will be accepted by the *Spectator* for a subscription extending beyond January 1, 1966. The interval between that date and my acceptance of a studio job will be required

for winding up the paper business, interviewing producers, washing the car, and getting a haircut and a shoeshine.

Entirely Agreeable Experience . . .

CONTACT with picture people has made the dozen years agreeable. As I remarked in the *Spectator* a short time ago, I am living where I want to live, doing what I want to do, making a living at it. The editorial policy of the paper from its inception has not been one to establish the making-a-living feature of it on a non-precarious basis. The *Spectator* is overburdened with a circulation. Purely as a manufacturing business it cannot pay its way, as it costs more than five dollars a year—the subscription price—to serve each subscriber. The difference has to be made up by the sale of advertising. People who work in pictures are its only possible source of advertising revenue, and it does not like to ask them to provide it. There is a sense of obligation to an advertiser which disturbs the balance between critical consideration of his contribution to a picture and the contribution to the same picture of one who has provided none of the advertising revenue. Being partial to a friend is a fundamental human impulse, and striving to avoid it is apt to lead one too far in an opposite direction, to make him lean backward too far in his effort to strike a righteous pose.

Has Been True to Itself . . .

ONE claim I would like to make: In twelve years of picture reviewing I have not written a line which did not express my honest opinion. The necessity of doing the same thing has been impressed upon all the others who have written reviews for the *Spectator*. During the years my opinions have changed, but in all their phases they were my own. On the whole, I have found picture people a grand lot, and to those who have been appreciative of the sincerity of the *Spectator's* editorial policy to the point of generosity in their financial support, I wish to express my thanks. My own view of the paper is a somewhat detached one; I feel it belongs to the art of the screen, whose espousal is its only interest; that if I, the individual, were tempted to color an opinion in order to gain material support for the paper, the *Spectator* itself would close its pages and refuse to

be betrayed. You see, the *Spectator* so long has been a part of me that I know it intimately.

* * *

JUST WHERE IT STARTED . . .

JIMMIE FIDLER came on the air and assured the universe that the two Warner squabbles, one with Bette Davis, the other with Dick Powell, were pleasant affairs with no hard feelings on either side—just a matter of two stars being agreeable to going off salary until suitable stories could be found for them. Hour-and-a-half later George McCall came on the air and told the same universe the squabbles are bitter affairs and that the parties to them are all het up. If screen commentators do not wish to make themselves and Hollywood ridiculous, they should get together and cook up one version of each thing they air.

* * *

SCREEN AS A MORAL FORCE . . .

HERBERT HOOVER, one of the clearest thinkers in the country, had this to say in the course of a speech he made in New York upon his return from a European tour: "While we should reject the whole idea of pledging our military or economic forces to any scheme for preserving peace by making war, we have both the obligation and the interest to organize and join in the collective moral forces to prevent war." The most powerful "moral force" in the world is the motion picture. For months the *Spectator* has been trying to impress upon the film industry that it has "both the obligation and the interest" to lift its powerful voice on behalf of universal peace. But one objection is offered the suggestion: A picture of the sort might not meet with favor in some foreign country, thereby depriving the producer of the revenue such a country generally provides. The insinuation is that American picture makers are willing to serve the public good if there is any money in it for them. "The mission of the screen is to entertain," is the cloak with which they cover their fear that there is no profit to be expected from a picture whose theme is peace. They would tell us there is not in Hollywood one writer who would make a plea for peace an entertaining part of an entertaining script, not one director who could make it into an entertaining picture, no players who could give it box-office value.

Demand for Peace Picture . . .

WHEN the *Spectator* in its columns urged Charlie Chaplin to make and appear in a peace picture, it did not anticipate the astonishing nationwide approval that has been accorded the suggestion. Its own files and those of the Chaplin studio contain hundreds of telegrams, letters and post cards from all over the country urging Chaplin to perform the public service the world so sorely needs. Numerous organizations have made their pleas. All the individuals and organizations heard from constitute a force which would make such a picture a great financial success if it were not shown outside the English-speaking countries. But one answer has been given all those who have endorsed the suggestion, an insolent

one made by Martin Quigley, the self-appointed mouthpiece of the industry and one to whom the industry has not denied the right to speak for it. Quigley tells all these earnest people that if they want a picture of the sort they should, "Go get a camera" and make it themselves. If Mr. Hoover includes the motion picture industry among the forces which have "both the obligation and the interest to organize and join in the collective moral forces to prevent war," he, too, probably will be told by Mr. Quigley to go get a camera. Such a command, being interpreted, means the picture industry feels it owes allegiance only to its bankers and none to either God or country.

* * *

OLD FAVORITES ON THE WALLS . . .

ON THE walls of the *Spectator* office hang autographed photographs of some screen players, not publicity stills signed by studio girls who make a speciality of copying signatures, but more artistic photographs autographed personally by those who sat for them and bearing friendly greetings to the *Spectator's* Editor. The photographs always will remain there to remind the *Spectator* of its youthful days. On the walls are those of Rudolph Valentino, Louis Wolheim, Jack Gilbert, Ernest Torrence, Marie Dressler, among those now playing their eternal roles; and among those still with us are Mary Pickford, Charles Chaplin, Colleen Moore, Janet Gaynor, Douglas Fairbanks, Constance Talmadge, Norma Talmadge, Jean Arthur, Zazu Pitts, Billie Dove, Mary Philbin, Ronald Colman, Jack Mulhall, Adolphe Menjou, Patsy Ruth Miller, Esther Ralston, Monte Blue, Jean Hersholt, Emile Jannings, June Collyer, Jetta Goudal, and William S. Hart.

* * *

CRITICS WILL HAVE THEIR FLING . . .

THE Reporter has stolen a march on all the other film publications, including the *Spectator*, which is green with envy and on bad terms with itself for its failure to think of the thing before Wilkerson did. Each month Reporter is to poll all the picture reviewers—three or four hundred of them—who compose the list of those accredited by the Hays organization, and will publish the result of the poll. The critics will pick the best picture, best direction, acting, writing, musical score, photography, etc. The result of the voting will be of interest to the film world and Reporter deserves credit for inaugurating it.

* * *

WILL HAYS vs. SPECTATOR . . .

WILL HAYS, in his last annual report to the board of directors of the producing organization, spoke with pride of "The maintenance of the highest possible advertising standard to make certain that pictures are properly exploited." In its last issue the *Spectator* took issue with Will and characterized producer advertising as "dishonest advertising; exhibitors and public alike know it to be dishonest." In *Variety* (New York) of March 30, there is a two-page advertisement which in huge type yells to the

world of the terrific box-office business being done by *In Old Chicago*. In San Francisco, it claims the picture was, "Blazing into second week after record-breaking first week!" Turning one of the *Variety* pages I found this in the news columns about what the picture is doing in San Francisco: "*In Old Chicago* (20th) (2nd week). Doing fairly well at \$16,000. First week's take \$25,000, big, but not a record-breaker." In their respective views of the ethics of film advertising, the *Spectator* seems to have the edge on Will Hays.

* * *

MYTHS GO ON AND ON . . .

STRANGE how film myths persist. Recently George McCall broadcast to the nation that Zasu Pitts might have developed into a great dramatic star if the public had allowed her to play anything but comedy roles. George cited the incident of the laughter which greeted her appearance in *All Quiet On The Western Front* in which she played a serious part, claiming it signified the public's refusal to accept her in such a part. Several times the *Spectator* has come to Zasu's defence by relating just what happened. I was present at the *All Quiet* preview. In the picture which preceded it on the screen, Zasu played one of her most hilarious roles, putting the audience in the mood to laugh at her when she made her first appearance in the picture which followed immediately after the comedy. The stupidity of Universal in eliminating her from *All Quiet* for such an illogical reason, caused the screen to lose a great emotional actress.

* * *

DUELLING WITH SOUND CONTROLS . . .

RECENTLY I had something to say about the manner in which Darryl Zanuck controls the sound volume at Century previews, and I have made several references to the loud noise which is a feature of previews at the Warners' Hollywood theatre. I am told that Jack Warner handles the sound when one of his important pictures is being shown the press. That explains everything. Darryl and Jack have been feuding more or less ever since the former went to Century, and now apparently each is determined not to let the other out-do him in making a noise. Another case of innocent by-standers doing most of the suffering.

* * *

WE AGREE ON A SCRIPT . . .

WHEN I wrote my review of *The Adventures of Marco Polo*, I had this to say about Robert E. Sherwood's screen play: "Seldom have I been impressed so strongly with the outstanding merit of a screen play. Not only does the action glide along in an easy, logical flow, but the dialogue, too, seems to have rhythmic progression. The brilliant author of *Reunion In Vienna*, *Idiot's Delight*, and other great stage successes, is equally at home in expressing himself in cinematic terms. His dialogue is terse, to the point, and his rich sense of humor almost slyly insinuates itself into the pattern at just the right spots."

Some time after the review appeared, a printed slip from Sam Goldwyn, attached to Frances Marion's valuable contribution to film technical reading, *How to Write and Sell Film Stories*, bore this message: "We are proud to tell you that Miss Frances Marion has selected the screen play of Samuel Goldwyn's *The Adventures of Marco Polo* as a perfect example of screen writing and has reproduced the scenario in her book." Seems that Miss Marion and I had the same idea.

* * *

CAN OPINIONS BE WRONG? . . .

WHEN one writes as much as I do, expresses so many opinions and distributes so much advice, it is inevitable that he receive now and then a letter taking him to task. One reader draws an indictment of me, stipulating eleven instances of my being wrong in things I have written. I differ with his view of what constitutes being wrong. I write only my opinions, nothing factual; I always am right in that the opinions really are my own. The opinions may be wrong from the viewpoint of some readers, but from my standpoint they are right. However, no writer is impeccable. But even in making that simple statement I would be declared wrong by Hazlitt if he were alive. He knew impeccable writers. In one of his *Table Talk* essays we find, "The only impeccable writers are those who never wrote."

* * *

STAGE AND SCREEN DIALOGUE . . .

SOME day some producer—heaven alone knows where he will come from—is going to have a simple story written for interpretation in human terms, and is going to have his players read their lines in simple, conversational tones—just talk with one another, without thought of diction or voice projection—and his picture is going to be a great box-office success. Pictures are harmed more than helped by the meticulous diction necessary on the stage, from which voices must be projected to distant seats. On the screen all a player need do is make himself understandable to the person he is addressing. The microphone attends to everything else.

* * *

SCREEN CREDITS SUGGESTION . . .

CONSIDERABLE discussion about screen credits is being heard nowadays. It certainly is absurd to start pictures with long lists of names which mean nothing to audiences outside Hollywood. Perhaps the names of two or three directors are known to the world at large, but the rest suggest nothing to the average picture goer. Members of casts, of course, mean something, but not as they are presented now, at the beginning of the film when we attach no importance to the fact that the cook is being played by Sophie Glutz. But perhaps Sophie's part is a big one and she comes through with a performance which makes us interested in her to the extent of wishing to know who she is. Sometimes the cast is repeated at the end of the picture. It should be there always or, better still, there should be a frame in every lobby

displaying the full credits of the picture being shown. This would make it unnecessary to show any credits on the screen, would save producers the cost of the film now devoted to them, and make audiences more contented.

* * *

WHAT WORLD NEEDS MOST . . .

THE Will Hays pronunciamento against propaganda pictures is as absurd as Martin Quigley's stand on the same subject. Either of them would find it difficult to name a picture he has seen which was not propaganda for something or other—for law observance, right living, square dealing, good sportsmanship—the list could be a long one. The screen's only mission is to be entertaining. If it can promote a commendable idea in an entertaining manner, there can be no possible objections to its doing so. Of course, Will and Martin would object, but I mean no possible intelligent objection. In a world gone mad there is need of a tongue to talk sense. The screen is the world's most eloquent medium as it can talk to both the ear and the eye, yet because it is controlled in this country by people afraid of their own shadows, it refuses to lift its voice in behalf of what the world needs most—universal recognition of the Golden Rule.

* * *

SUGGESTION FOR FILM STORY . . .

WHILE listening to police broadcasts last evening I wondered why some producer does not make a picture in which the police radio figures from beginning to end, which brings out the relentless manner in which the man wanted is dogged at every step in his attempt to escape by the persistent voice of the air. Incidental announcements could provide the comedy element. The other evening, for instance, a call went out to a police car to go to a certain address and "investigate a peeping tom in a fig tree."

* * *

IGNORANCE THAT IS EXPENSIVE . . .

MAJORITY of motion picture producers know so little about pictures that they assume there is nothing to know. That this is true is demonstrated afresh every time the author of a short story, novel or stage play is brought to Hollywood to write a screen version of it. The excessive amount of dialogue, which so largely is responsible for present unsatisfactory box-office conditions, is due to the employment of so many writers who are trained only to express themselves in dialogue and who lack even elementary knowledge of screen requirements.

* * *

AT HOME AND ABROAD . . .

SEVENTY-TWO per cent of the people of the United States view motion pictures with varying degrees of regularity. In no foreign country are film audiences drawn from more than twenty-five per cent of the population, yet one of the chief concerns of American producers is not to put in one of their pictures any scene the people of even a remote

and unimportant foreign country might resent. If Hollywood would think only in terms of the domestic market for its pictures and tell the rest of the world to go hang, the American film industry would have no financial worries.

* * *

WRITERS AND THEIR BUSINESS . . .

WE NEVER are going to have a flow of evenly prosperous pictures until screen writers are relieved of the necessity of preparing scripts to conform to producers' conceptions of the manner in which they should be prepared. The writer's business should be in the hands of the writer.

* * *

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

WILL Edward G. Robinson keep his tobacco secrets to himself? Ever since a paper announced a dash of vanilla in his smoking mixture improves its aroma, I have had to carry my humidor under my arm all day and take it to bed with me at night to keep it from being polluted with the smelly stuff. . . On Sunday I leaned over so much to plant flowers that on Monday I could not stand up straight until well along in the afternoon. . . I once was the guest of the captain of a freighter on a trip from Duluth to Buffalo, stopping at all the Great Lakes ports. . . I like the radio performances of Madge Evans; her voice suggests the charm of her personality. . . In the rush to put things in order after the flood, some city employee carelessly put up a North Hollywood street sign so close to a light it can be read at night. . . Never saw finer sweet peas than those blooming in our garden now. . . To my way of thinking, Herbert Hoover is the biggest man in the country today; the second time he spoke on the radio, I introduced him; he was nervous and asked that no one except the two of us be in the broadcasting room; his recent speech was one of the greatest I ever listened to. . . Congress should stop wasting time on unimportant things and do something about Benny Goodman. . . Hugh Herbert gave our dogs rubber rats which squeak. Will he please come and get them? I got up in the middle of the night to adjust a noisy window, and stepped on one of them. The horrible squeak chilled my leg right up to the hip. . . Never could understand why, "He has hair on his chest," is supposed to be a compliment; I think it looks sloppy. . . Una Merkel is one of the nicest girls in pictures. . . Been carefully tending a little plant growing among the rose bushes; today discovered it is a weed, but I am letting it live because I had called it Throgmorton and can't kill anything I have named. . . In my experience I have found no place more pleasant for lunching than the Beverly Brown Derby. . . Do you think I enjoy sitting here on the lawn, writing this stuff when so many things in the garden need attending to? You do? You're balmy! See that box of carnation plants on the edge of the petunia bed? Well, I'm going to celebrate the *Spectator's* twelfth birthday by knocking off work and planting the carnations.

Film Guilds and Their Objectives

Writers Guild

MY LETTER to Dudley Nichols, president of the Screen Writers' Guild, was a request to him to write for this issue of the Spectator a general article on the work of the organization he so ably and energetically heads. He replies in the form of a letter to me, a really brilliant letter, as you will agree when you read it.—W.B.

DEAR Welford:

Your invitation to clear the fog about the Screen Writers' Guild is both generous and timely, and I am glad to make a statement on behalf of the membership, even though there is no time to consult either members or the Executive Board and I may rashly commit myself on some point of policy in which everyone will not concur. We are a democratic lot and, thank heaven, extremely vocal, never hesitating to bash down an opponent with our shillelagns, which are as good as an admission card to any meeting. Hence many an outsider has mistaken one of our mild arguments for a massacre. Hence, secondly, if I am cracked down on at the next membership meeting, the responsibility rests on you. Nevertheless, thirdly, I believe my views will represent the generality of opinion and policy within the Guild.

Fog Is Not Real . . .

NOW about that fog: It isn't real. It is good, old-fashioned stage fog which drifts in upon 1655 North Cherokee almost invariably from the direction of a studio. A lot of the fog is red. It is most peculiar. Nick Harris reports that he can find no producers' fingerprints on the fog-guns. The executives are as innocent as newborn babes. The most industrious fog-gunners, he finds, are certain writers who are too busy pumping away to get much writing done, and they love their toys so much they even take them home at night or to company union offices. Harris further reports that some of these chaps, really fine fellows, pump away in all honesty and loyalty, with the simple faith that they are drilling for the day when their fog-guns will be filled with mustard gas and aimed at Stalin, after he lands on the Maine coast and marches on Los Angeles. And the producers, as I said, are blameless. After all, stage fog is useful. Certain "shots" could not be made without a layer of fog to conceal the studio wall in the background.

Enlightened Self-Interest . . .

ACTUALLY what is the Screen Writers' Guild? Nothing more than a group of able men and women who have joined together for mutual and enlightened self-interest. That is as bluntly honest a statement as I can make. Observe that I say "enlightened" self-interest. That means I must work

for the good of my own producer as well as for myself, and just as hard. I must work for the good of the industry as a whole as well as for myself, and just as hard. Harder in fact. For if the industry, and the producers in whose hands lie the power and responsibility to guide and run it, do not prosper, neither will the writer nor any other worker who is a part of its gigantic whole. Enlightened self-interest means that every writer must work in the interest of his craft and in the interest of every other worthy writer as well as for himself. As respect for film-writing increases, so does the self-respect of the film-writer grow, and the quality of his writing is enhanced.

Interests Are Mutual . . .

AND for enlightened self-interest, the writer must respect and work in the interest of the director and the actor as well as for himself. It has a big meaning, enlightened self-interest. It is one of the most powerful of human motives. And if you root deep enough you will find it cannot tolerate dishonesty, greed, disloyalty or any other evil. But neither can it tolerate being flummoxed, squeezed, taken advantage of. It doesn't want a wage cut plopped upon it without proof that it is enlightened self-interest, and that takes a lot of proving. For instance, an office memorandum of Mr. Zanuck's was recently given wide publicity, and it did not get outside the studio without intention. It called for harder work and drastic economies, which are highly proper at this time. But in calling for reduced writing costs Mr. Zanuck mentioned as money-makers *In Old Chicago* and *Happy Landing*, and unless I am badly mistaken, each had a script cost so low it would make the average producer dance for joy. My information may not be correct, but if it is, the script cost of *Happy Landing* was about one per cent of what it should gross. And if Mr. Zanuck cast forth this memorandum as a straw in the wind to indicate an eventual salary cut, he will find no small group ready to be stampeded into acceptance, as in the old days before the Guild, but a group of self-respecting people who are willing to cooperate if the necessity is evidenced, but must first take the matter back to their Guild for full consideration.

Has Other Principles . . .

ENLIGHTENED self-interest is certainly one plank of the Guild. There are other principles, but most of them could be embodied in that one. We respect our employers, we want to work hard and loyally for them, we want them to make good pictures and profitable pictures, for all that is to our advantage. It is high time they realized that we want to be friends with them as well as workers for them. Writers are not fools. They know they are essential to picture making, as essential as directors and actors. In one sense they are more essential, in that they are the first shift without which nothing can begin.

Some directors are also writers, but it is seldom possible to have sufficient energy to write and direct simultaneously. And if one of these few, exceptionally gifted men sits down first to write his script, then he is a writer at that time, like any of us. There is no quarrel between writers, directors and actors. They understand each other. And there should never be any quarrel between these groups and the producers.

Point of View Not Narrow . . .

IF THE Guild aspired to obtain any improper power or wield any selfish influence over the industry, it would not long endure. Nor would it deserve to endure. It does not exist for any class of writer. It numbers those who are up and those who are down, those who are coming up and those who are going down, and it must serve all impartially. We realize that in an industry in which energies are used at high tension, there must be a continual flux of talent, new blood coming in as the old dries up. A closed shop would choke this vital flow. Guild shop, which I am sure we shall sooner or later obtain, gives mutual protection without checking the flow.

Has Had Its Troubles . . .

THE best guarantee of the Guild's good faith in these matters is its own history. However it has been kicked around it was no foundling. It had many good fathers, the ablest and most honorable of Hollywood writers, though I cannot say much for its mother, which was the fifty per cent cut. Certainly we had fights in the Guild. We made mistakes. Who hasn't, with the best of intentions? We had little knowledge then and no experience of organization. From the first we sought recognition and decent bargaining relations. We were mistrusted by the producers, perhaps naturally enough. On short sight an employer prefers to have unorganized employees. It takes long sight to see the advantages of intelligently organized groups, disciplining themselves and determined to deal fairly for the common good. We tried hard for recognition, but it never came. Never a nod. When the NRA came along, the producers were obliged to sit down with our committee, but the nod was even then not up and down but sidewise, until the NRA went with the wind.

Union with Authors' League . . .

A STUBBORN refusal of recognition drove the Guild on towards its next logical move—to unite with the Authors' League and form a single national organization of writers in all fields. That was a colossal job. It meant reorganization of the well-established League and adoption of a new constitution that would embrace all writers—dramatists, novelists and screen writers. Difficult as it was, the job was finally accomplished. The League with its thousands of members was reorganized and a new constitution voted. Then something happened. The phrase "control of material" was unfortunately used in the Screen Guild magazine as one of the aims of the merger. The producers roused from their tents overnight with spears and bucklers. To them the phrase

meant that the Guild proposed to corner the world market on story material. What was actually meant, and it was not entirely the fault of the producers that they were able to construe the phrase mistakenly, was that the League would be able to back up the demand of one of its member guilds for simple recognition.

Guild Has a Set-Back . . .

ALL screen writers know what happened publicly, how working writers were summoned sternly to executive offices and warned in no veiled terms what would happen if they voted for the merger with the League, how the Guild collapsed overnight in consequence. But only a handful can know what happened privately. While the dying Guild was burning like the phoenix, a rival organization leapt into being, received the mystic handshake and in a very short time had not only been recognized by the producers but had negotiated a contract for its members.

Their Stand Sincere . . .

THESE writers, it was said, were the gentlemen of the business, the conservatives, the men who could be trusted. In all fairness let me state my opinion that some of them sincerely believed their accusations against the merger of Guild and League. Whether there was any basis of justice in their claims will never be known because the all-embracing constitution of the new League was never tried, not on the West Coast at any rate. It worked excellently in the East for the Dramatists' Guild and nationally for the Authors' Guild. But the Screen Writers' Guild, though it never died, languished. With so few members there was no chance to test the working merits of the new set-up. The old charge of radicalism was also raised.

Then Came Wagner Act . . .

IT WAS the Wagner Act that revived the phoenix. Overnight it rose full-fledged. And the members of the Guild determined that this time the old accusation of "control by the East" and "no autonomy" would not be raised. The Council of the League granted temporary autonomy while the Guild set about the gigantic task of once more amending the constitution. It was difficult because novelists and dramatists and radio writers found it hard to understand why, after years of negotiating for national unity, we now desired a looser connection with the League. But it was finally accomplished, and today the Guild stands separate and self-governing and yet is firmly interlocked with dramatists, authors and radio writers when it comes to problems of mutual interest, or where the interests of one group can be injured by the invasion of another group into the same field of writing. We of the Guild feel that our slate is clean. We feel that we have fought a clean fight and won. Now we await the decision of the National Labor Relations Board, and whether or not we are granted the election for sole bargaining power which we have asked, we know the Guild is here to stay. We cannot be defeated save by our own mis-

takes, and with decent tolerance of each other and common sense and fairness we shall avoid them.

Red-Baiting Goes On . . .

MY DEAR Welford, I know you are waiting to hear me say something about screen art and the real business of the writer, and I should like to have my say about that too, ardently as I agree with you on some items and violently as I dissent in others. But these facts needed to be recounted, so that we may not be befogged so easily. The red-baiting goes on. I am tainted myself, because I had the sense to visit Russia and see for myself, as if a man should be called a fish because he goes in swimming. For myself I make it a point not to know the political and economic leanings of fellow members unless they choose to tell me, which none of them does. It is none of my business. I know their leanings as writers and that is my business. I know many of them are politically conservative and I fervently hope many of them are equally radical. You can enter no intelligent group today without encountering both right and left. To be without the left would be a sign of dry-rot. To be in a group that is all extreme right would be damned dull, and that's a fact. Have you ever spent a night at the Union League Club in Boston? I spent a year there one night.

Conservative and Nihilist . . .

WRITERS are supposed to be people who think and a good writer is supposed to have courage. Name me the ten greatest writers from Voltaire down to Shaw, and I'll show you ten people who laughed at ruling ideas and the authority of their day, and had a grand time doing it. One century's heterodoxy becomes the orthodoxy of the next. The only thing that doesn't change is change. The only time a brook stops running is when it freezes or dries up. I don't want either. And the man who tries to keep things exactly as they are, trying to keep the brook of time from running into the future, isn't a conservative. He's a damned nihilist. The man who goes out and throws away his life for the sake of democracy is your real conservative. He's trying to conserve something important to us all. . . . But this isn't a lecture. And screen writers aren't allowed to use politico-economic ideas anyway, so the fate of screen art doesn't hang on the matter.

Is Not a Bogeyman . . .

I KNOW what you're saying: Let's cut out all this dialogue and get down to the art of the camera, and why don't you fellows forget all your goings-on and get down to brass tacks—write good pictures? We're going to. Soon the producers will discover that the Guild isn't the bogeyman they thought it was, that they have nothing to fear from us and great good to gain from us, and there will be recognition and we'll all chip in and buy Mr. Schenck a gold-engraved testimonial, and maybe Jack Warner can have one too, because he's already mixed up with a lot of folk from the three Guilds in the Motion Picture Relief Fund. And then I can stop writing

letters like this and turn out that script for Pan Berman, for after all RKO's paying me. . . . Only I would like to sneak one more night and take up the gauntlet with you about screen writing. Meanwhile, Birthday Greetings to the *Spectator*.

DUDLEY NICHOLS.

Actors Guild

By Kenneth Thompson

(Executive Secretary, Screen Actors' Guild, Incorporated)

I HAVE been asked to do this article for the *Spectator* and gladly comply, because your Editor insists that I outline the aims, duties, responsibilities and aspirations of the Screen Actors' Guild. Naturally most of the Guild history before April of a year ago was made by the earnest group of actors and actresses who met weekly to consider the best way to gain recognition of the abuses suffered by actors in the Hollywood area and to devise some way of correcting them. From this sturdy group was formed the Screen Actors' Guild. While the early years of the organization were marked with many rebuffs, they were never marked with a loss of enthusiasm or courage. When the Guild's board of directors achieved Guild Shop last year, they had accomplished a major objective, for they had won a contract with the producing companies which gave a ten per cent increase for all extra players, established the principle of fair arbitration and gained many other valuable concessions for all classes of players. Naturally this brought a tremendous increase in membership, for the books of the organization had to be kept open as provided in the contract, and created a number of immediate responsibilities which differed in many ways from those ever shouldered by any similar group of artists.

Some Guild Accomplishments . . .

THE tasks of, checking the provisions of the contract, interpreting the complex problems and the

EDWARD EVERETT HORTON

CARLTON SAND

.. Writer ..

establishment of a code of procedure found this same board of directors laboring far into the night, week after week. Some of the concrete gains have been: 1. The drastic reduction in the number of eligible extras. In March of this year the membership books of the Junior group were closed, insuring that never again will the extra market be crowded with casuals and thrill seekers. 2. The Guild collects many thousands of dollars monthly in adjustments for all types of players—a distinct gain, as heretofore the smaller players and extras had no organization to fight their battles.

Revision of Minimum Contract...

AT THE moment, the Negotiating Committee is starting a series of conferences with the producers for a revision of the Basic Minimum Contract. Members representing the Guild are President Robert Montgomery, Franchot Tone, Kenneth Thompson, Murray Kinnell, Irving Pichel and Aubrey Blair. As these negotiations will very likely require some time, the committee is being guided and governed by the board of directors. The recitation of these facts and some of the procedure relating to Guild practices suggests your Editor's query of what is in store in the future for the Guild; what its future accomplishments may be and the principles which guide it.

Occupies Unique Position...

TO UNDERSTAND this it is important to bear in mind that the Screen Actors' Guild occupies a position unique among the performing unions; that it is related to Actors' Equity, the American Guild of Musical Artists and the American Federation of Radio Artists, under the general charter of the Associated Actors and Artistes of America. While the picture industry for a time seemed to tend to the strengthening of the parent organization (the Associated Actors and Artistes of America) as a common meeting ground, this thought has been somewhat altered so that the member organizations might continue to exercise autonomy. The benefits of mutual action have been so conspicuous and so definite for all performers in the entertainment field, that their future gains are assured. Some hostile, rebellious and mischievous elements have appeared from time to time as is natural in any organization of such dimensions,

but the fact that the Screen Actors' Guild has attained the position it now occupies is proof in itself that the Guild stands established and reflects the unity of purpose of its entire membership. This, naturally, is a matter of high satisfaction to those members of the board of directors who have so conscientiously and steadfastly guided its destiny.

Has Confidence of Members...

I THINK it is proper to draw attention to the fact that the Guild has been conducted in a manner which has earned the confidence of its membership as reflected in their loyal support as well as the respect of the substantial men of the studios with whom it has daily contact. In instances where its members have been made the targets of unjust treatment it has been swift to act as the records will show. Out of this has come a new mode of practice over the past year, and one which has made for more consideration for the players, one too which has deduced abuses to a minimum. A further protection for the players has been developed with the provision compelling "promotion" companies to post ample bonds so players' salaries may be protected. At this moment when there is a spirit of uncertainty in the production end of motion pictures, it is quite impossible to foresee what and how much may be accomplished for the various divisions which make up the membership of the Guild. It is heartening to know, however, that the Screen Actors' Guild, composed as it is of, by and for actors, is attuned to its membership through a

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board of directors of farsighted and conscientious players. They have brought the Guild thus far along the road and it is reasonable to expect that they shall take it forward in the march for a betterment of all conditions which touch the welfare of all of us.

Directors Guild

By Scoop Conlon

(Publicity Representative of the Screen Directors' Guild)

TWO years, three months and five days ago today, a group of motion picture directors met in a room in a downtown Los Angeles office building to found a constructive organization known as the Screen Directors' Guild. The founders who put their John Hancocks on an agreement were Howard Hawks, Frank Tuttle, Gregory La Cava, A. Edward Sutherland, Lewis Milestone, Rowland V. Lee, Wesley Ruggles, John Ford, Rouben Mamoulian, Richard Wallace, John Cromwell, Frank Borzage, William Wellman, Wm. K. Howard and King Vidor. They got together to see what could be done about restoring the importance of the director in the motion picture industry. This was in January, 1936. These men who believed themselves and their colleagues to be the central creative force in making motion pictures felt that their foundation had been undermined over a period of years. In other words, these directors knew that no longer did they enjoy the distinction, importance and creative freedom in the motion picture industry that should be theirs by right of achievement.

Declaration of Independence . . .

CONTRARY to general belief within the confines of the studios, these directors were not revolutionaries, although they signed a declaration of independence. In two short years their record of Guild achievement has been purely constructive. In the beginning, these fifteen men had to fight against skepticism and apathy. However, within a week or so they had ninety-four members. The leaders wrote a platform in which they clearly expressed their aims and policies. Once establishing their belief in their importance as individuals to the motion picture industry, the directors next lent their aims and policies as a Guild to the task of reaching an agreement with the producers which would be of mutual benefit.

Put House In Order . . .

STILL a house divided, the Guild and its leaders soon decided that it would be wise to first put their house in order. For a year they executed their plans so quietly that the Guild seemed dormant to the industry. The goal was a 100 per cent membership. One year ago the Guild launched a membership drive. Today, the Screen Directors' Guild numbers 224 director members, which represents 95 per cent of the directors in the motion picture industry. In that short space of time, the Guild has gone places. Several months ago approximately 350 assistant di-

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Supervising Art Director

rectors were taken into the Junior Guild. It was felt that the man closest to the director, the man who might be the director of tomorrow, was clearly entitled to the Guild benefits.

Importance of Directors . . .

NOW presenting an almost solid front as a Guild, what has been done about restoring the importance of the director? In the past two years, a score of directors have established box-office records equaling or surpassing their artistic achievements. Of these many were billed as producer-directors, which means that the producing companies clearly recognized their importance to the industry. It goes without saying that other directors will follow in their footsteps. What are the aims and policies of the Screen Directors' Guild? To avoid the technical, let us say that the Guild is not anti-producer, but rather—pro-director! As a creative group which is an integral part of the motion picture industry, the Guild feels that it can and should successfully co-operate with the producers in guiding the destinies of the industry.

No Wish to Dictate . . .

THE Guild has no desire to dictate, but rather to participate. The directors do not believe in arbitrary decisions. And, where it concerns their own, they wish to have a voice in the decisions. For example: the directors do not believe that the necessary solution to bad business in the theatres is to cut salaries. Nor that such procedure prevents companies from going into receiverships. The Screen Directors' Guild is pleased to cooperate with its brother groups. The directors feel that the actors and writers are equally anxious and determined to cooperate to the fullest extent in bettering the conditions in the motion picture industry. And, they welcome this constructive cooperation.

Have Done Good Work . . .

THE Board of Directors include King Vidor, president; Lewis Milestone, vice-president; Richard Wallace, secretary; John Ford, treasurer; Gregory La

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FORWARD PROGRESS OF
CONSTRUCTIVE FILM CRITICISM

FRITZ FELD

Cava, Frank Capra, Howard Hawks, A. Edward Sutherland, Herbert Biberman, Phil Rosen, Frank Tuttle, John Cromwell, Wesley Ruggles, Rouben Mamoulian and William Wellman. In the face of past criticism and skepticism, these men have toiled in a good cause unflinchingly, and with a determination to see it through. They have labored unselfishly and intelligently to attain their goal. They feel that the goal is just around the corner because they have supreme confidence in the motion picture industry.

Members Actively Interested . . .

IN MAY, the Guild elects a new Board. Probably there will be several new faces on the Board, as the directors feel that every man in the Guild membership is capable. During the past year there have been an increasing number of open Board meetings with a gratifying attendance which has crowded the Guild offices. The present leaders have encouraged interest and cooperation to the extent that many not listed here are actively and enthusiastically engaged in serving on various committees. Among these are the committees doing the work on the Tri-Guild Ball and the Motion Picture Relief Fund. Pervading the Screen Directors' Guild is the feeling that when the producer, director, actor, writer and other creative workers unite in a common cause, namely, the solidification of the motion picture industry, the word "Relief" will be a total stranger.

Industry Should Take Stock

By Roy Del Ruth

ONCE every year, and sometimes more often, every substantial and successful mercantile business submits to an inventory which discloses its true state of affairs. A banker has his daily balance sheets; men in the medical profession keep a keen eye on all new developments in technique and compounds. They all amount to about the same thing; taking stock. And that is what is needed in this motion picture industry. Ever so often, on stated periods, we should take stock of our business. We should go over the books very carefully, see what types of pictures and players the public enjoys the most, determine the box-office desires of our patrons. At the risk of sounding like a hack, I can say that far too many producers are still making their pictures for Hollywood, instead of producing them for the fertile fields of patronage beyond the fair hills of our homeland.

Some Have the Right Idea . . .

NATURALLY, this is not true of all producers. There are those who are smart enough not only to anticipate public demands, but to actually create new trends in entertainment. These are the ones who prosper and one might think that they would profit by the other fellow's shortsightedness. But I have views to the contrary. Under a system which is beyond control, it is a fact that bad pictures profit from the good ones, while the good films suffer from

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To The
Spectator*

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HAROLD WILSON

those of inferior standards. Men, women and children who make up the rank and file of theatre patrons seldom give serious consideration to the film fare offered them. Except for first run, de luxe houses, the general attitude of film patrons is one of "let's go to the movies tonight." This is proved by the prosperity enjoyed by some producers who have turned out product unworthy of trade approval. If the picture or pictures they see are good, they leave the theatre in a frame of mind which is conducive to further patronage. If they are disappointed they will stay away from the theatre for quite a while, regardless of the quality of subsequent offerings.

Cheapness Not Good Policy . . .

THERE are two ways to make pictures. One is to spend whatever money is needed to create films that the public will enjoy. The other is to see how far a dollar can be stretched in production. We have any number of high class individuals and concerns who know that cheapness is a shortsighted policy. But the reward for their interest in the welfare of the industry as a whole is to suffer the consequences of unscrupulous fellows who "cash in" on this quality product by shoving alongside it pictures that can only alienate the good will they have created. It is unfortunate but true that the industry has little chance of protection in the matter. Laws designed to maintain democracy in business are blindly invoked and good intentions are erroneously labeled "unfair trade tactics" or "restraint of trade."

Suggests Substantial Policy . . .

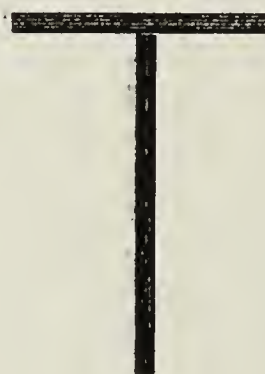
SO, WHAT to do? I think it is obvious that there must be some substantial plan of relief from this insufferable condition. I believe that the motion picture industry, as a whole, must take some action that will enable the public to protect itself against the unscrupulous ones who prey on the loyalty earned by earnest and fair dealing producers. This could be done only by concerted action on the part of square dealing picture makers. We have any number of reputable organizations and groups within the industry. They stand for good entertainment. They want to offer the public a dollar's worth of entertainment for the dollar spent at the box-office. But their efforts end there, literally stymied for lack of a workable plan.

To Protect Against Fraud . . .

TO MY way of thinking, the film industry needs some sort of "stock taking" body that can act for the industry as a whole in creating quality entertainment. It could establish a mark of quality with which the public could become acquainted. Such a mark, widely used in advertising approved pictures, would insure the public against what literally amounts to fraud, not only to the patrons, but to the industry itself. The creation of a standard and the adherence to it by responsible producers would soon have its telling effect. The public would know that a program bearing such a mark would not be an

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irritating loss of time, but an evening well spent. And from the industry's viewpoint, there would be no loss of competition. It would simply provide a base or standard of quality from which all pictures would have to start. Beyond that, it would be up to the individual producers to do the best job possible.

Directors of the Future

By Wesley Ruggles

THE future of the motion picture industry, a matter of grave concern to hundreds of thousands of persons in its production and affiliated branches throughout the world, is something that deserves no little thought from those who are now riding in the saddle of authority. There is little doubt that the talent end of the business will take care of itself. It always has, and with studios always trying hard to develop new players, there is little reason for worry on this score. But in production departments it is different. Where will our great directors of the future come from? To date, most of our directors have come through the ranks via two routes: 1.) hard work; 2.) good luck. Some have enjoyed the combination of the two and they have been eminently successful. But directors who have had only one avenue of opportunity have not done as well as they sometimes deserved. In other words, many men who have been well trained in the ranks have not had the good fortune to find the right route up, while those who, through social, business or other connections have had perfect entre, have not been qualified by prior training for the responsibilities entrusted to them.

What the Industry Should Do . . .

THE motion picture business is now old enough and big enough to rectify this situation. There are several ways in which this could be accomplished and it is only a matter of finding the proper method and then going ahead. Naturally, it will cost some money, but the results will certainly justify the small expenditures required. The main thing is to determine whether a young fellow with ambitions to become a director is temperamentally fitted for the task. That, to my notion, is the prime qualification, because a person whose personality is not appealing or does not know how to treat and handle people, cannot expect to reach the real mark of success. After

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this is accomplished, it is merely a matter of deciding upon a standard course of training. The production of pictures has become complex and there is much to know in the way of basic information. The need for this was apparent when talking pictures supplanted silents and too many worthy men were left out in the cold because they did not understand the real rudiments of drama. All they knew was the technique of following a script, putting the required scenes before the camera and then getting the most in the way of mugging.

Look At An Old One . . .

IF YOU do not believe that this day is passe, just take time out and see a couple of the films which, in the silent era, were hailed as masterpieces. In retrospect, of course, we cannot lessen their importance, but on a basis of present day competition they stand out only as museum pieces. Today's dramatic requirements reach the highest point in all theatrical history. It is true that the motion picture has much more latitude than the legitimate stage, but it is likewise true that in a film production you have to crowd much more material, maintain a smoother pace and get in all the realities which are frequently excused from a stage presentation. Thus, from the very start, the aspiring director must know his drama. Beyond that is the maze of knowledge which must be acquired along technical lines. It includes a well grounded education along construction lines, stretches into architecture and decoration, leans to various phases of engineering and includes the highly technical aspects of cinematography and laboratory work. To my way of thinking, there must be a well defined course of training if the embryo director is to cover all the required educational background. When that education is complete, there should be a standard course of advancement, beginning in the ranks of assistant directors and leading upward to the higher salaried jobs of directors, producers and studio executives.

Would Develop Man Power . . .

SUCH a procedure would give the industry a sturdy army of dependable, well-trained men, anxious to achieve success through hard work and capable of

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giving, in return, services that would be productive of outstanding results. Today we have no such uniform plan and I, for one, think it is high time that something be done about it. Almost every other profession in the world has taken cognizance of its future needs and has mapped out courses of training designed to keep it supplied with wholesome new blood. Why is the motion picture industry an exception? Largely, I believe, because we have been so concerned with getting our great business on a sound footing that we have had to overlook many necessary details. But the time is ripe now to think of the future and to see that the men who will take up the reins when we are willing to relinquish them, are worthy of the trust we must of necessity pass on to younger hands.

Value of Story Treatment

By Howard Estabrook

GIVEN equal story values, the only inherent excellence which one picture may achieve over another lies in treatment. The after-dinner speakers (on different nights, I hope) tell the same story—one makes of it a brilliant gem, the other delivers commonplace results. Identical story—different treatment. Extracting the bare story line of a popular novel in a single paragraph often amazingly reveals that the charm lies in the treatment, not in the story itself. It is a waste of money to write a full screen play before treatment is right. Tens of thousands of dollars have been wasted; thick scripts in full dialogue have been written, tossed aside or put on the shelf permanently, not because the dialogue isn't good, but because the treatment of the story, the approach, is wrong. A treatment script of wafer thinness should reveal this, rather than a costly screen play approaching the dimensions of a telephone book.

Treatment Form Vital . . .

ALL indecision, all changes of opinion, should occur when the script is in treatment form—and not only for economic reasons. There is an even better reason. After a writer has poured his work into a full-length screen play, basic changes become disruptive. Imagination applied to a treatment should visualize final results and permit necessary changes in advance. One could prove the reverse, of course. Fine pictures have resulted through writing and rewriting of dozens of versions of full-length screen plays by different sets of writers—but this is the luxury method. That, if I may say so, seems on the way out. The staggering overhead caused by this method is piled upon the actual cost of the final picture and then upon the shoulders of the sales department, which must produce new dollars for all those wasted. **Director Should Cooperate . . .**

BETWEEN writer and director there should exist the closest cooperation. Treatment is a directorial responsibility as well as a writing responsibility, although the basic elements must be in the script. The

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AND
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CONTINUED SUCCESS

LEW AYRES

*Heartiest
Felicitations
to The Spectator
on its
Twelfth Birthday*

TORBEN MEYER

director's work of visualization is definitely a form of writing, even though he never writes a line on paper. Careful preparation before actual writing is often found in the history of noted literary works. Often such preparation is done mentally, without a line on paper, and the full writing is then done straight off. This method is rarely possible in the picture field. The treatment must be known in advance for many practical reasons. It is not safe to depend upon verbal presentation—too much risk of misunderstanding—influence by high-pressure salesmanship—colorful promises that do not materialize—glowing "ideas" that don't come through. When the architecture of a picture is correct, then only should we start the detailed building, known as writing and producing.

CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by
RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD
of
MABEL KEEFER

GREY OWL, the famous Indian naturalist who is engaged in conservation work for the Canadian government, has anticipated Mr. Quigley's advice to all and sundry to "Go get a camera!" He films his own pictures, or rather, the Canadian government does. These pictures are the realization of one of Grey Owl's greatest ambitions—to get the beautiful Mississauga country on the screen, and they really are quite thrilling. My biggest thrill, however, came when, as I watched canoes shooting the dangerous rapids of the Mississauga River, suddenly I realized that the background music, of which I had been only vaguely conscious, was a recording of *The Ride of the Valkyries*, from Wagner's *Die Walkure*, and that instead of being incongruous, as one might expect, it was, amazingly, the right music for the scene. Consciously listening, I had a few moments of pure enjoyment as the music rose and fell and swirled with the canoes and the water. But, always from a distance. Never was there any suggestion of instruments—just the background of musical sound. The soft passages were perfectly distinct, yet when the music swelled in a crescendo, always there was that effect of distance. I do not know exactly how this was achieved with a phonograph record, but it was most satisfying—a real "background" of music.

* * *

HO, ALL ye advocates of swing, if ye would settle everything, please write more music of your own, and we'll not have to groan and moan in agony of soul and mind, the while, in manner unrefined, ye maul and rend and also tear a classic, or a tuneful air. 'Tis not good sportsmanship, I wain, to take the child of someone's brain and treat it in a wanton manner—I swear 'tis not, so help me Hanner! And inasmuch and furthermore, kind, gentle sirs, we do

**More Power to
The Spectator!**

JOHN LITEL

*Many Happy
Returns of
The Day*

C. HENRY GORDON

implore that ye will surcease to us bring, and write your own dear swingtime swing.

* * *

WHAT Editor Beaton has to say about short films, in the March 19 issue of the *Spectator*, reminds me of my favorite subject—musical shorts. And when he says "Metro" in connection with short subjects, my immediate reaction to that word is: Jeanette MacDonald—Nelson Eddy, in a musical short done in such a manner as to make it an artistic gem, which should be very easily accomplished with those two superb artists. And by "artistic gem" I do not mean something stiff and studied and too serious—there is nothing artistic about that—but something with lilting, stirring, perhaps plaintive music; a touch of poignancy; and scope for Mr. Eddy's flair for humor. There is artistry in humor. Mr. Beaton also quotes Bert Harlen's statement that the public wants emotional reaction, and how can you get more emotional reaction than with a good baritone singing a love song—using tone color and not volume to put it across. That last is important—in fact, a not too steady note helps. But of course I may be prejudiced, what with my weakness for baritones, bass viols and tubas.

* * *

A LOVELY musical moment or two: The violin music in the restaurant scene in *Romance In The Dark*.

* * *

SPEAKING of *Romance In The Dark*, I imagine that its box-office report from this town will be bad. So was the advertising. One assumes that a picture of that type is made primarily for people who like good music, but not the slightest effort was made to attract them. The picture was shown in the second best theatre in town, (all the theatres but one are under the same management) on a double-feature bill, and advertised in the newspaper "... plus *Romance In The Dark*." Not another word. The point is that the title meant nothing to the type of person who really would have liked the picture. Just as an experiment, I asked several people if they were going to see *Romance In The Dark* and, invariably, the answer was "What is it? Who is in it?" The original title would have been much more intriguing. Contrast "... plus *Romance In The Dark*" with "*The Yellow Nightingale*, featuring Gladys Swarthout and John Boles." Which would have the greater drawing power with those who appreciate artistic merit?

* * *

WARAGHIYAGEY: A Mohawk Indian word meaning "Chief Big Business." Wonder if the Mohawks had a word for colossal? I am sure it would be something that would be picturesque for use in the film industry.

* * *

BET Dr. Ussher is given an Academy award for being the most asking-questionest man extant. (March 19 issue of the *Spectator*.) Meanwhile, I am hanging around to hear the answers.

Kathleen
and
Gene
Lockhart

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TO THE
SPECTATOR
ON ITS
12th BIRTHDAY**



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*BEST
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AL JOLSON

Current Trend in Screen Music

By Bruno David Ussher

MORE than at any other time in the history of the cinema, dramatically vital music before long will be made in Hollywood to accompany film plays of every type. A survey based on interviews, or in some cases, based only on necessarily brief inquiries, leaves no doubt in my mind regarding the above statement. No survey of this nature can be complete. I must plead limitation of time. Some studios have asked grace of time to formulate a reply; two important spokesmen have pleaded rush of work and may be quoted later. But sufficient and thoughtful response, given with honesty of hope and purpose, assures me that music in Hollywood pictures is going ahead. The type of picture based on the vicissitudes and victories of a prima donna or would-be prima donna has been made to the point of saturation. The piling up of songs in the musical or extravaganza may continue now and again. It is not good for music and not sure as a money-maker. One or the other studio may revamp old-fashioned opera, but that takes courage and voices. Lack of singers, of great singers who look well and can act, of young singers who have great vocal appeal, is bemoaned. The more artistic directors have become more music-conscious. Cinema value of really fine background is being recognized. Studio music department heads are thinking in those terms more than at any time. They would not do so, unless this trend had backing from the "front office" and from the public.

Record-Breaking Line-Up . . .

A RECORD-BREAKING list of names of composers can be culled from studio lists with hardly touching upon their song-writing colleagues. A few of the studios rely on the combination of names of singers and well-rounded music staffs, such as Warner Brothers and MGM. Director Forbstein has Max Steiner and Erich Korngold as his ace composers. Finston of MGM has Stothart, Ward and half a dozen others, while his roster of singers includes Nelson Eddy, Jeanette MacDonald, Allan Jones, Ilona Massey to mention but a few. Goldwyn will go into a huddle with Jascha Heifetz within a fortnight. Louis Silvers has a versatile staff at Century, including the distinguished Ernest Toch. Walter Wanger has enlisted Werner Janssen of *General Died At Dawn* score fame. Disney is ready to unleash the spell of Stokowski in *Sorcerer's Apprentice* and *Pinocchio*. For that matter, Universal's music department under the sensitive and showmanship-wise Charles Previn has claim on Stokowski for a second picture. Paramount has signed Kurt Weill for a second film. The same studio has bespoken Serge Prokofieff through Boris Morros, who has also Dmitri Tiomkin, working with Director Henry Hathaway on *Spawn of the North*. Jerome Kern has just finished a score for RKO where a splendid staff under Dave Dreyer includes the pre-eminent Russell Bennett. And Morris Stoloff of Columbia

tells of plans for a Chopin picture which should make screen music history.

Require New Formula . . .

WHAT is needed is a *new formula*, in the opinion of Dave Dreyer. The RKO music department head has the situation analyzed well. One of his chief objections to the music-dramatic procedure followed heretofore, is that very often only one person in the cast is a singer of real solo quality. The result is lack of balance, lack of convincing qualities. The great handicap in making singing pictures is the lack of vocally fully developed singers. "We can show them the technique of picture making and recording. But we are not here to teach voice and interpretation. Too many singers believe that all they need for success is to have a natural voice. They should go to small radio stations and gain experience. Who can make good musicals without good music personalities? The film vogue for using operatic excerpts is nearing the end of what one might call a cycle. The operetta type of musical will continue, provided we have the material. I think we have it in a production such as Irving Berlin's *Carefree*. Dreyer expects high success from *Joy of Living*, the Irene Dunne feature for which Jerome Kern wrote the songs, Russell Bennett the score. A musical comedy, *Fiddlestick*, featuring Mitzi Green, music by Lou Brown and Ray Henderson, too, should register strong.

Big Background Scores . . .

THERE is the general cry for new cinema operettas. As Dave Dreyer contends, a dramatically relatively weak affair may succeed on Broadway because of footlight appeal of personalities in the cast. The best singer or player cannot save a film if the film play lacks dramatic potency. RKO may make new versions of *Irene* and of *Rio Rita*. "I am convinced, however, that we are headed for a big cycle of films in which background music will prove highly important," Mr. Dreyer said. "There a composer can start from the very core of the story. The great difficulty still is that much of the music cannot be written until the film is shot completely and cut. That puts a time pressure on the music department. It is a condition prevailing in every studio. The success of a score then depends on fast work and great skill, and I am lucky to have such musicians working with me. What is more, there is an 'esprit de corps' at RKO for which I am very happy. I have found it necessary to divide writing and scoring of a picture among five members of my staff, and yet a well unified background music has been achieved. Release dates do not wait, and the music department is expected to make up for time lost elsewhere."

Deanna Durbin Still Leads . . .

ONE does not have to talk very long about music to Charles Previn at Universal, to realize that Deanna Durbin continues to lead. In other words,

her new picture, *That Certain Age*, is occupying some of the very best efforts out there. Producer Pasternak and his musical collaborator, Previn, set a high mark with *Mad About Music*, the last Durbin film, coining a fortune for the studio. Durbin, if I understand correctly, is devoting herself now only to the making of her new picture. That means also greater concentration of personality value. There will be at least four songs, by McHugh and Adamson, the same team which succeeded so admirably in *Mad About Music*. Universal has also an option of Stokowski's services for a second production, so Mr. Previn reveals. Stokowski's *100 Men and a Girl* made money, more money than is generally assumed. Universal evidently is banking heavily on vocal assets. Hope Hampton will be featured in a picture, *Road to Reno*, containing operatic excerpts. There will be a Danielle Durrieux film with important music. "There is no need to defend good music any more than to defend films with a serious aspect. All that is necessary is to present music well. It must be used naturally and be technically flawless."

Columbia Turns to Chopin . . .

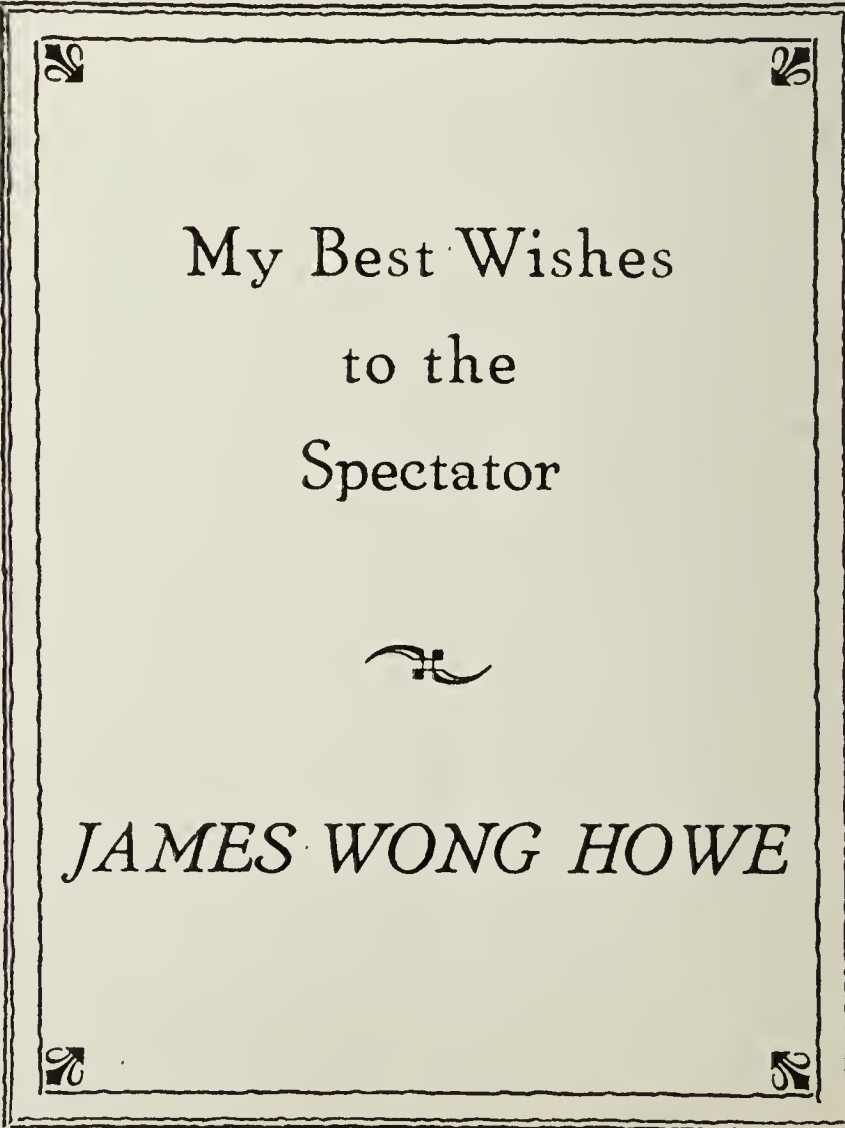
COLUMBIA STUDIOS led the parade with opera pictures, starting with Grace Moore's *One Night of Love*. Whether there will be another Moore song-picture is a matter of opinion, also a matter of the right story. This artist has made several productions of this type. Mr. Cohn is a man of courage and of judgment, and has understood how to pick people who can take up an idea and also can drop it. I would think that operatic films are being rather relegated at Columbia. They are proud of their musical achievement in *Lost Horizon*, for which Tiomkin wrote a score occupying nearly an hour of music in the course of a two-hour film. Some people thought that this score, and Max Steiner's score for *Zola* would run a close competition for the Academy Award. There will be a super score soon, bearing the Columbia trade mark, which has become a hall mark for musical standards. That film will be based on the life of Chopin. He led a most romantic existence. His was a most romantic age. Director Capra and Music Director Morris Stoloff are planning a production which will be viewed and heard ten and twenty years as a human musical record.

Education and Edification . . .

COLUMBIA's *Chopin* film will be a most thoughtfully prepared production, Morris Stoloff tells me. The story draft by Sydney Buchmann is now in the hands of Director Capra who employed music so sensitively in *Lost Horizon*. "We shall engage one of the very greatest Chopin players of the day, so as to afford millions of film patrons the pleasure of hearing a musically supreme portrayal of the composer. Both Josef Hofmann and Moritz Rosenthal are under consideration. As always in the case of such peerless artists, the question of availability and concert tours has to be considered. This *Chopin* picture will probably run an hour and three-quarters. It will not merely deal with a few sentimental anec-



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JAMES WONG HOWE

dotes, but will bring to the screen a broad record of this entire romantically glamorous age. Apart from great political and literary figures, including, of course, George Sand, the list of musical characters will include Berlioz, Liszt and Paganini. So you can judge the scope of musical material which we can use through every medium, whether solo, orchestral or vocal. It will be a picture that can be shown for many years to come to audiences of every type and to schools in every country of the world."

You and Me and Zaza . . .

WHICH heading is just a way of reminding myself that Kurt Weill, the theatre-minded and yet romantic German composer, will be back on the Paramount lot within a few days to complete the score for the Fritz Lang produced and directed *You and Me*. Music has been employed by producer and composer in a novel way. In fact, Boris Moros, ensconced in his elegantly refurbished office at the end of the long music building, still keeps me under a promise of secrecy. The new Weill-Lang method has been called a novel musical scenarization. I dare to lift the curtain for the over-curious, by saying that Weill has done, in collaboration with Lang, what he achieved so strikingly in his all too little known dramatic cantata called *Lindberg's Flight*. Those who heard that work, broadcast a number of years ago by Stokowski, can guess what I mean. Paramount has been so gratified with the songs and orchestral sketches of Weill that they have re-signed him. He was to write the music for the Wanger production of *The Adventuress*. Instead the score has been assigned to Werner Janssen, who also wrote his notable *General Died At Dawn* score for Morros. Weill, whose specialty is modern drama and opera of contemporary background, will compose new music for *Zaza*. The original music was composed by Leoncavallo, but in that version the opera lacked realism.

Prokofieff for Paramount . . .

BORIS MORROS is justly proud to have the promise of Serge Prokofieff, internationally renowned Russian composer, to write two scores for Paramount. "I am expecting Prokofieff in February of next year," Morros assured me. "One score and for that matter, the picture, too, will be based on his own satirical story, *Peter and the Wolf*. The other story has not yet been chosen definitely, but very likely the subject may be drawn from early English history of the Arthurian era. I am planning a large score of novel effects, yet musically sound, in the picture *Men with Wings*. Tiomkin already has started work on Hathaway's *Spawn of the North* production. Hageman may write the music for Frank Lloyd's next picture, *If I Were King*, an original version based on the *Vagabond King* story material, with complete underscoring. As for opera films, I decline to say that their day has passed. It depends on the story. I am just now going through material for such stars as Gladys Swarthout, Tito Guizar and Florence George. Opera films may have been overdone, but I'm still willing to bet on opera, given the

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right voice, the right personality and a lively script, one providing for a convincing use of music."

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

MOST COMPETENT JOB...

● **OVER THE WALL;** Warners release of a Cosmopolitan production; associate producer, Bryan Foy; original screen play by Crane Wilbur and George Bricker; director, Frank MacDonald; assistant director, Jesse Hibbs; dialogue director, Jo Graham; photography by James Van Trees; film editor, Frank Magee; sound recording, Stanley Jones; art director, Esdras Hartley; gowns by Howard Shoup. Cast: Dick Foran, June Travis, John Litel, George E. Stone, Dick Purcell, Veda Ann Borg, Tommy Bupp, Robert Homans, Mabel Hart, Jimmy O'Gatty, Ward Bond.

ONE of the most consistently good bits of screen entertainment I have seen in a long time; class B as to budget, class A as to brains, and not a moment when it is not engrossing. Frank McDonald was handed a competently written screen play and gave it direction which develops all its values. The story is a psychological study with dramatic trimmings. McDonald makes it so gripping, so human, so sympathetic, we are not conscious of the study angle of it, not aware that a basically cold human problem is being solved before our eyes. Dick Foran is a fighting roughneck, a bully, unreasonable, incorrigible, a believer in the doctrine of fists as the determining factor in any difference of opinion. Innocent victim of a frame-up, he lands in the state penitentiary and becomes its most unruly, most rebellious inmate. John Litel is the prison chaplain. Quiet, pleasant, tolerant, determined, he is the precise opposite of Foran. He senses the latent good in the unruly prisoner, patiently delves for it and finally brings it to the surface. Litel, representing normal society; Foran, representing intolerance, social abnormalities, personify the conflicting elements which constitute the story.

Litel's Brilliant Performance...

OVERLOOK this picture because you deem it unimportant and you will deny yourself a rare treat which it provides in the performance of John Litel. Seldom has the screen presented us with a character study so mechanically simple and so spiritually powerful, one which is so completely human yet so rich in Christlike quality. There is nothing effeminate in Litel's chaplain; he, too, has fists, one of which in the opening sequence comes violently into contact with Foran's chin, much to the consternation and chagrin of that young man. Litel has everything the public likes and could become one of the big box-office stars if some producer had gumption enough to give him the opportunity. Foran is the perfect opposite for Litel in *Over The Wall*. He comes through with what appeals to me as his best performance to date. At the outset the unreasoning bully, the inherent charm of his personality kept him from becoming wholly unsympathetic even when making an ass of himself. McDonald realized the importance of sustaining the audience's interest in Foran to the

WESLEY RUGGLES

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FREDERICK
JACKSON
Writer

point of desire to see him reform, and ably brings this out in his direction.

Foran's Fine Singing Voice . . .

THERE are songs in this prison picture, and never have songs been worked more logically into any picture. Litel is groping for some spark in Foran's makeup that could be ignited, something which would respond to the chaplain's treatment. He is getting nowhere. One night he hears Dick singing in his cell—the lead the chaplain needs. Through his love of singing the unholy prisoner is reformed. Dick's voice amazed me. I had no idea he was such an accomplished singer, that he had a voice so rich, so powerful and so full of feeling. And Warner Brothers import a stranger to screen audiences to play the lead in *The Desert Song*! Foran would be a sensation in the part, but he is just a Warner contract player and the thing to do nowadays is to import a Metropolitan singer when there is an important singing role to fill. June Travis gives an admirable performance in the leading feminine role in *Over The Wall*. All the performances, in fact, are excellent, Dick Purcell, Ward Bond, John Hamilton, Jonathan Hale, George E. Stone, Veda Ann Borg being among those who stand out. All the characters in the story are made human and understandable by the consummate skill McDonald displays in his direction. He is one of the young directors who some day will be doing big things.

WILL PLEASE ALL AUDIENCES . . .

● **UNDER WESTERN STARS:** a Republic musical Western; associate producer, Sol C. Siegel; directed by Joe Kane; screen play by Dorrell and Stuart McGowan and Betty Burbridge; original story by Dorrell and Stuart McGowan; production manager, Al Wilson; photographed by Jack Marta; film editor, Lester Orlebeck; costumes by Irene Saltern; musical director, Alberto Colombo. Cast: Roy Rogers, Smiley Burnette, Carol Hughes, Themselves, Guy Usher, Tom Chatterton, Kenneth Harlan, Alden Chase, Brandon Beach, Earl Dwire, Jean Fowler, Dora Clement, Dick Elliott, Burr Caruth, Charles Whitaker, Jack Rockwell, Frankie Marvin.

ENTERTAINMENT for everybody; another picture which demonstrates that budget alone does not mean box-office. There is ten times more real entertainment in *Under Western Stars*, costing, I presume, a very modest sum, than there was in *Sally*, *Irene and Mary*, which no doubt cost ten times as much. The Republic musical Western moves rapidly from beginning to end, presents a new star who is sure to make friends, has some first class singing and

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a lot of superb riding. You probably will not see it, as it is not likely to be shown in the houses you frequent, but if you do run across it, you will find your time well spent. The story is about something—the havoc wrought by dust storms, which in *Under Western Stars* are blamed on water companies, which rob the soil of the moisture it needs to keep it green. Whether the picture correctly presents the situation I do not know; but I rooted for the cattlemen, hissed the water company people and had a thoroughly good time.

Roy Rogers Engaging Star . . .

THE picture presents a new Western star in the person of Roy Rogers, a clean-cut, upstanding young fellow with a pleasing personality, good singing voice and as much grace in the saddle as Fred Astaire reveals on the stage. Rogers does not mount his horse; he floats upwards and on to it. In one shot he leaps when his horse is in motion, his toe finds the stirrup before any other part of him touches the saddle, and he glides into his seat to the sound of audience applause. But he gives no exhibition of horsemanship as such. It is part of the story, his way of doing things. Opposite him is Carol Hughes who demonstrates possibilities which Warners did not realize when she was under contract to it. Attractive looking, wearing clothes smartly, a good speaking voice and a sense of humor, she could go places if given half a chance. Smiley Burnette proves again that he is a splendid comedian, and, for a man of his massiveness, a remarkable rider. The screen play by Dorrell McGowan, Stuart McGowan and Betty Burbridge is a commendable bit of writing.

Is Given Good Direction . . .

JOE KANE, director, keeps the story running smoothly and rapidly and develops expertly its human qualities—a really creditable job. Jack Lawrence, Peter Tinturin, Eddie Cherkose and Charles Rosoff contribute some songs which are sung in a manner to meet the demands of the most ambitious production of any of the major organizations. The Maple City Four, a quartette popular with radio audiences, makes a big contribution to the entertainment quality of the picture. Alberto Colombo deserves credit for the manner in which all the music is presented. Sol Siegel reveals competence in providing a broad-scale production with a visual sweep to which Jack Marta's camera does full justice. But

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Under Western Stars does one silly thing. It presents Roy Rogers as Roy Rogers, thereby keeping always in the minds of the audience that it is looking at a screen actor and not at the person he is playing, a treatment which reveals picture intelligence in its most elemental, infantile stage. But nearly all the smaller Westerns do it. That is one big reason why they remain small.

ENGLAND SERVES A GOOD ONE . . .

● **TO THE VICTOR;** Gaumont-British; director, Robert Stevenson; story, Alfred Ollivant; screen play, J. B. Williams; photographer, Jack Cox; music direction, Louis Levy; film editor, R. E. Dearing. Cast: Will Fyffe, John Loder, Margaret Lockwood, Graham Moffatt, Moore Marriott, Wilfred Walter, Eliot Mason, Bromley Davenport, H. F. Maltby, Edmund Breon, Wally Patch, Alf Goddard.

FEATURES: Authentic Scottish background; consistent, tightly knit story; really thrilling scenes of sheep dogs in action; a grand characterization by a great actor—Will Fyffe; first-class direction. As the American film industry has taught the public to buy only names, the majority of picture patrons in this country are going to miss a treat by their failure to enter theatres which bear only *To the Victor* on their marquees. Will Fyffe can fill British theatres, but his name means little over here. I saw him in London just before the World War broke and remember him as the only vaudeville performer who could make his audience laugh one moment and cry the next. His characterization in this picture, that of an old Scotchman, a drunkard, owner of a champion sheep dog and an attractive daughter, is one of the finest things I have seen on the screen in many a day. Never for a moment does he come out of character; always he is the dour, cunning Scot. The only drawback to American audiences his performance will have is the authenticity of his dialect which at times is a bit too thick to be readily understandable.

Some Great Dog Stuff . . .

DOG lovers will find *To the Victory* fascinating. The work the two leading dogs do in the way of rounding up sheep in the trials for the championship cut is amazing. At the word of command each dog rushes off to find a group of five sheep; locates them, keeps them together, drives them through a gate, up a ramp to a wagon, off the other end, across a bridge formed by two planks without railings, and finally into a small pen, the whole undertaking covering a wide expanse of territory. There is nothing much in



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the telling, but you should see it! It is gripping, dramatic. The story centers our interest in the contest between two of the dozen dogs which compete, makes us pull for John Loder's entry to win. When his dog was declared the winner by two seconds, the preview audience greeted the announcement with a great burst of applause. The dog sequences, of course, are pure motion picture, there being no dialogue to muddle them up. But they by no means are the whole picture. The story, by the manner in which it is told, will hold your complete attention throughout.

Directed with Understanding . . .

AN HOUR or so after I had seen the picture, someone asked me what I thought of the direction. I told him I had not thought of it at all, and that, perhaps, is the greatest tribute I could pay it. There was nothing in the picture to suggest direction, the story seemingly telling itself, and that means a thoroughly competent job. Robert Stevenson, the director, has other commendable achievements to his credit and certainly has what it takes to turn out winners. *To the Victor* as a production is not a big, expensive one, but it is most impressive. Shot in Scotland, it brings us welcome relief from our over-worked backgrounds. Gaumont-British, in its effort to get a foothold with American exhibitors, seems to be taking the wise course of sending us pictures with human appeal and not trying to compete with us in the matter of production costs. I can recommend this one to all classes and all ages of picture patrons. In John Loder and Margaret Lockwood it has young people who register strongly in a delightful romance woven unobtrusively through the drama of life in the hills of Scotland.

COULD BE A LOT BETTER . . .

● **NURSE FROM BROOKLYN**; Universal; associate producer, Edmund Grainger; director, Steve Fisher; screenplay, Roy Chanslor; photography, Milton Krasner; music director, Philip Cahn; film editor, Paul Landres. The Players: Sally Eilers, Paul Kelly, Larry Blake, Maurice Murphy, Morgan Conway, David Oliver, Lucile Gleason.

WILL have to heave hard to sustain its half of a double bill if the other half has any weight at all. It is not as bad as most class B productions, but I do not see why any class B production need be bad; nor can I see any relationship between the number of dollars put into a picture and the amount of sense it contains. For the sum Universal spent on *Nurse From Brooklyn*, and with the same cast and director, it could have made a picture entertaining enough to satisfy any audience. Instead, it gives us a drab, sordid recital of a murder free from mystery, an extraordinarily inept handling of the case by the police department, a leading women who initiates nothing, a leading man who has to struggle manfully with his lines to make them mean anything, with "comedy relief" which add to the gloom—and for the money spent to make that sort of picture, a nice little bit of engrossing entertainment could have been turned out. Producer Grainger, of course, will plead that the same



CLARENCE BROWN'S Best Wishes to The Spectator on its Twelfth Birthday



standard of criticism should not be applied to class A and class B pictures, that *Nurse From Brooklyn* is "only a class B." When film exploitation departments begin to advertise a production as "only a class B" I will be glad to criticize it with regard for the degree of candor thus displayed.

Simon's Direction Good . . .

THE part assigned to Sally Eilers provides her with no such opportunities as she had in *Condemned Women*, in which she gave such a good performance. She is a negative character, her only positive contribution to the story being her agreement to assist in the murder of the man she loves, but she does not stick to even that resolution. Instead, she agrees to marry him in order to give the story the conventional film ending. Paul Kelly makes the most of a poorly written part. He is made much too frivolous to match what should be the dramatic mood of a crime story. Morgan Conway, who recently came back to Hollywood after two years on the New York stage, is excellent in the few scenes in which he appears. He appeals to me as an actor who could achieve great popularity on the screen. Mauriee Murphy starts the picture off in a most engaging manner, but is murdered promptly in order to give the authorities a crime to solve. Director Sylvan Simon is in no way to blame for the unsatisfactory results obtained. No director could have made a good picture out of such a poor script. His work shows promise and demonstrates he would be a safe man to trust with a more important job. Whatever merits *Nurse From Brooklyn* contains are to be credited to him.

AS SILLY AS ITS TITLE . . .

● **GO CHASE YOURSELF**; RKO release of a Robert Sisk production; director, Edward F. Cline; screen play by Paul Yawitz and Bert Granet; original story by Walter O'Keefe; musical director, Roy Webb; photographed by Jack MacKenzie; special effects, Vernon L. Walker; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate art director, Feild M. Gray; gowns, Renie; edited by Desmond Marquette; song by Hal Raynor. Cast: Joe Penner, Lucille Ball, Richard Lane, June Travis, Fritz Feld, Tom Kennedy, Granville Bates, Bradley Page, George Irving, Arthur Stone, Jack Carson, Frank M. Thomas.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

FEW bright spots and many dull ones characterize *Go Chase Yourself*, the new Joe Penner opus. The story depends for its motivation upon Penner's being a congenital idiot, and then is kept on its feet by large injections of coincidence. This, of course, might be overlooked if the piece were consistently funny, but it is not. Two or three of the gags were

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clever and spontaneously performed, receiving and meriting good laughs, but, by and large, the laughter from the audience was feeble. The picture is often talkative, there are lapses in the tempo of its movement, and digressions in the action. It will get by before indiscriminate audiences and on double bills; but so has a lot of truck. Penner fans will perhaps see the picture through more mirthful eyes, for the funnyman's bag of tricks is much in evidence and he strews his wares about with energy and zeal.

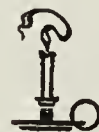
Too Big a Bite . . .

MOST patrons, however, probably will opine that the comedian is not quite equal to carrying a picture on his own. The chief weakness of Penner's comedy is that it is out of key with the acting of the other performers. Penner's clown, lumping all the inanities of the human race, is funny in vaudeville and radio and even in musical films because the patter he uses for such occasions permits the character to be something of an abstraction; but when the same figure is placed in realistic situations, an incongruity results. When, upon seeing a poster on a tree announcing a reward from the police for his apprehension, he bursts into his babyish bawl, the effect is jarring. No one can believe in such an idiot. His funniest stunts are those he does mostly in pantomime. Clowns, incidentally, have never been very successful in talking pictures.

Performances Undistinguished . . .

THERE are no noteworthy performances, most of the players doing their stunts in the same kinds of parts they have done innumerable times before. Lucille Ball, as the comedian's wife, is comely, but her attainments as an actress are negligible. She must have practiced at idle moments when a little girl, in order to be able to burr her r's in the rivet-like manner that she does. June Travis evinces acting intelligence, but the camera is not focused on her long enough for her to make much of an impression. Richard Lane, Fritz Feld, Tom Kennedy, Bradley Page are, of course, efficient. Cameraman Jack MacKenzie deserves credit for some skilful process shots of a mountain road unwinding through the window of a trailer which is running wild down the grade, these shots lending excitement to the final sequence. Too bad he was not given more agreeable things to photograph throughout the picture. For there are few

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pleasant things to look upon, and there is no romantic interest. The picture is sterile, hard, unlovely. And it is crowned with a new low in showmanship—its title.

HAS WELL-BUILT SUSPENSE . . .

● **BAR 20 JUSTICE:** Harry Sherman; producer, Harry Sherman; associate producer, J. D. Trop; director, Lesley Selander; screen play, Arnold Belgard; additional dialogue, Harrison Jacobs; original story, Clarence E. Mulford; photography, Russell Harlan; film editor, Robert Warwick; art director, Lewis J. Rachmil. Cast: William Boyd, George Hayes, Russell Hayden, Paul Sutton, Gwen Gaze, Pat O'Brien, Joseph De Stefani, William Duncan, Walter Long, H. Bruce Mitchell, John Beach.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

MUCH better than the last of the series. A well-plotted and plausible story, with an element of mystery in it, competent direction and some good performances result in a Western film considerably above the average in calibre. Hopalong Cassidy, his buddies Windy and Lucky, again champion the cause of justice and adroitly save a young widow the loss of her gold mine, out of which some rascals would swindle her. The miscreant miners, in her own employ, ignore the lucrative channel of the mine during their day's work, but enter it at night through a secret entrance from an adjoining mine, an entrance through which a hairy and murderous hand stretches during the daytime to silence any inquisitive soul who is on the verge of discovering the valuable ore that abounds there. Then a timber is thrown on the victim's body to make the misfortune appear accidental. It is all very eerie and suspense-laden.

Boasts Robust Comedy . . .

WILLIAM BOYD plays Hopalong with his customary restraint and sincerity. As he recreates the Clarence E. Mulford character it has more dimensions than most Western figures and should find favor with a more discriminating type of audience than such films generally cater to. Some rousing humor is gotten across by George Hayes, as Windy, especially when he pretends to be deaf in order to secure a job as night watchman and discover the plottings of the miners. Some of the resultant situations have a finely robust comic spirit. Russell Hayes, as Lucky, is likewise in good heroic form and is likable. Paul Sutton, appearing as a crooked foreman, presents one of the most remarkable voices yet heard from the talking screen, abysmally deep and hollow. The quiet and pleasant-voiced Gwen Gaze is believable as the perplexed heroine, though a greater range of vocal inflection would have added interest to her performance. And would it have been anachronistic if her hair were not in ringlets? Pat O'Brien and Joseph De Stefani both intrigue with fervor, the latter characterizing well and commendably, but a mite too physically for the screen.

Bullets Last Long . . .

GOOD technical values have been put into this Harry Sherman production. Some right pretty outdoor shots are contributed by Russell Harlan,

Birthday Greetings to the Spectator

EDWARD
LUDWIG

cameraman. Director Lesley Selander has kept the action crisp, the characters sharply drawn, their heroics and villainies acceptable—that is, if you get into the spirit of the thing. The only anomaly that creeps into my mind occurs in the sequence where Hopalong gallops his steed into the darkness to pursue the routed archvillain. Next morning he is still in pursuit and exchanging with him a volley of bullets. Had they been shooting all night? What quantities of ammunition the gentlemen must have carted. And I thought Hopalong a better shot. The screen play was by Arnold Belgard, with additional dialogue and sequences by Harrison Jacobs.

What Foreign Market?

By Robert Joseph

THE recent developments in Europe and in the Far East in connection with the motion picture business make it increasingly clear that America no longer holds sway at foreign box-offices. With American exchange offices disappearing by decree, and personnels vanishing by military order, grosses took fantastic drops. However, part of the tragedy lies in the fact that Hollywood has adopted such an insularity that anything which transpires east of Santa Anita and west of Culver City makes no impression. But ere long the foreign market situation will vitally affect Hollywood studios. Already the first faint strains of that discordant symphony of beyond have pierced sound proof stages; staffs have been rigorously cut. But perhaps the next change will be a little more fortunate. Perhaps Hollywood will forget restrictions imposed by supersensitive governments and make pictures that really count—pictures for the American public.

Six Million Market . . .

WHEN in 1932, the good dove of peace might have alighted on almost any portion of the world without fear of being pierced by an upraised bayonet or swallowed by the mouth of a gaping cannon, Hollywood garnered six million dollars worth of motion picture business from abroad. There were export difficulties then, mostly concerned with the problems attendant with sound. During the silent days inserted captions were easily translatable. However, dialogue in sound made the problem of translation a little more difficult. But even that stumbling block was not so great, for the following year American films earned a like amount. The dictum then was that Hollywood could not afford to affront any national groups; boy met girl and the continental film fan paid his zloty or pengu or lira. As the years rolled on, various nations on the continent took a newer and higher political sensitivity, and ideas became dynamite. In order to protect that annual six million Hollywood had to tread the tightrope lightly; this it did with amazing agility. Six million bucks is six million bucks.

But two things happened to The Earth. The depression, then coming to its height, made the

JOHN BRAHM

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for

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wholesale shipment of gold for imports unwise. And nationalism grew to a new intensity. The six million dollar income dwindled with each successive year in direct proportion with the increase of supernational consciousness. Currency laws and censorship restrictions began to play havoc with Hollywood's film import abroad. The case is best stated by Joe Seidelman, foreign chief of Universal, who said for the English trade paper, *Today's Cinema*: "Companies had better come to a realization that the foreign markets are shrinking because of currency restrictions and the political conditions prevailing in certain territories." His was a nice evasion of the pertinent facts by stating the case without naming names. It is no secret that Germany and Japan have ended Hollywood dominance in the motion picture markets of the world by the simple method of keeping the films out and keeping already earned incomes in.

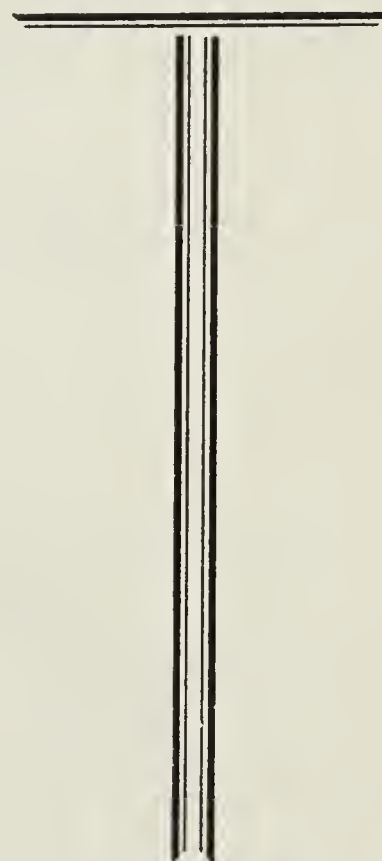
German Sphere of Influence . . .

QUOTED in a past issue of the *Spectator* is this observation from *Today's Cinema*: "Central European film developments are increasingly a microcosm of the larger political world. . . . Germany is the real storm-centre. . . . she is still a large producer . . . and the smaller countries have large German minorities." These words were written early in February, fully a month before the recent *Anschluss*. Yet, they clearly forewarned closer trade relations between Germany and Austria. Since that time the German sphere of influence has spread fanwise as far North as Scandinavia and as far Southeast as Roumania. Even Czechoslovakia, irreconcilably anti-Nazi, has been forced to admit large numbers of German pictures, to the obvious disadvantage of Hollywood products. Poland, obviously under the influence of German trade policies, has been taking German pictures wholesale. An agreement has been reached between Germany and Hungary whereby Budapest will take thirty-five German films for the year. Note that all the five Hungarian pictures accepted by Germany in exchange, must be made in accordance with the Aryan (Anti-Jewish) Paragraph of Production. And these thirty-five films represent fifty per cent of Germany's entire output.

South Into the Balkans . . .

IT IS reliably reported that Roumania and Germany have a reciprocal agreement whereby Germany will accept Roumanian films if they are made under the Aryan clause. Germany, in exchange, will finance the construction of studios and theatres in Roumania. Nor has Italy been silent partner to all this operation. The Rome-Berlin axis makes the two countries partners in plunder and profit, and they have reached an amicable agreement regarding film exchanges. Of course, all pictures must be made under the Aryan Clause, which prohibits every kind of Jewish participation except that of working capital. That is why Rome and Berlin found Metro's partnership in the Italian firm ERA through Hal Roach, acceptable. The Italian sphere of influence, and

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therefore the German, has spread into Yugoslavia. The German *Film-Kurier* writes the story in this fashion: "The penetration of the Italian film industry into Yugoslavia is a natural result of recent political developments."

West to South America . . .

NOR has Germany given up the Yugoslavian field entirely to Italy. Axis or no axis—business is business. The press reported the visit of Stanko Tomashish, head of the Yugoslavian Film Chamber. His visit was to have taken him on an inspection tour of the German Film Academy. He was royally treated to several hours of Nazi newsreels and then went on his way. A report of the screening points out that the films dealing with Nazi Germany's five year celebration made a particularly deep impression on him. He left for home the following day. Although there were no reports of any trade agreements, Stanko Tomashish did not go to Berlin to sit through several hours of uplifted hands and "Heil Hitlers!" On January 18 of this year another visitor, this time to Italy, Hugo Sorrentino, South America's most important film importer, renewed trade agreements with Rome. He left for Berlin after contracting for *Scipio Africanus* and other Italian pictures. Through his efforts during the past few years Germany has become the chief exporter of films to Sr. Sorrentino's homeland, Brazil. Brazil, by the way, is the western hemisphere's latest fascist dictatorship under the watchful guidance of Emilio

Vergas, self-perpetuating president.

East to Japan . . .

THE isolationist principle is most adequately expressed by Shiro Kido, head of the Ofuna Studio, in the columns of the Japanese *Osaka Mainichi* (Daily News): "It is true that we have learned much from the Occident, but today there is nothing more we can learn from foreigners. On the contrary, we are just as good as the foreign movie industrial technicians. There is no reason why the movie industry alone cannot bring about the Japanese supremacy in the world." At present American picture incomes may not be withdrawn from Japan, just as they may not be withdrawn from Germany, Austria, or many of the other Nazi-Fascist satellites. Add to this situation the fact that because of foreign warfare there is no market in either Spain or China. Before the civil war in Spain, that country ranked sixth as an importer of American-made films. The British Quota Act, passed by the Parliament several days ago, makes restrictions even more difficult than the Quota Act of 1927 which was severe enough. England will remain our chief importer, but under conditions which make large profits unlikely. With all this knowledge it is a tragedy that the industry's MPPDA annual report should have glossed over the situation so blithely. The conclusion is obvious. Hollywood cannot depend upon an annual picture profit of six millions from the foreign field. The market for American-made films is America.



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A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—April 23, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 2

Nine Years Ago and Today

The Editor Digs Up An Old Prediction
and Endeavors to Justify Himself
as a Cinematic Prophet



Musical Treatment Suggestion

Ussher Tells How Metro's "Test Pilot" Could
Have Been Improved By More
Reliance Upon a Score



... REVIEWS ...

TEST PILOT ★ KING OF THE NEWSBOYS ★ COLLEGE SWING
CALL OF THE YUKON ★ INTERNATIONAL CRIME ★ BROKEN BLOSSOMS

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From the EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

BUT THE TAIL WAGS THE BULL . . .

LISTEN to this, will you? I quote from an article in the September 21, 1929, issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*:

The silent screen is not dead. Talking pictures never had the remotest chance of supplanting the silent variety. Within a year the studios will have swung back to their silent programs, with here and there a talkie mixed in to supply the exceedingly small market that will be available to it.

Now who do you suppose made such a nutty prediction as that?

I did.

When I made the prediction, how was I to know the whole world was not going to keep in step with me? How was I to know that during the nine years that were to follow, a real tail was going to continue to wag a bronze bull? It is possible my second question puzzles you somewhat. I had better explain it.

Curse of Microphone . . .

WHEN the curse of the microphone fell upon the art of the screen, picture producers welcomed it as something that would add a touch of realism to their product, thereby displaying their ignorance of the fact that the whole strength of the screen as an art lay in its extraordinary ability to create, not reality, but the illusion of reality. When pictures were silent they consisted entirely of a series of photographs doing things. You knew photographs could neither act nor react, feel emotion or display it, yet you were entertained by what the photographs did because you did not see them as photographs, because with the cooperation of your imagination they created the illusion that you were looking at real people doing normal things. You never would have paid your money to see two photographs embracing, but you were willing to spend it to see the beautiful heroine sink into the embrace of the stalwart hero following the ironing out of all the complications which had kept them apart until the final fade-out. Then you must have seen them as heroine and hero, not as two photographs.

Where the Bull Comes In . . .

VERY well. Nor, did you ever hear a photograph talking? But, you will argue, if we can delude ourselves into the belief that a photograph of a person is a person, what is to interfere with our believing the words we hear actually are being spoken by the per-

son we have created from the photograph? Nothing—but the talk we hear is an anomaly. It is reality injected into the veins of an art of the illusion of reality. This brings us back to the bronze bull. In the *Saturday Evening Post* article from which I already have quoted, I was discussing this question of illusion and reality. I quote again:

Let us suppose that Chicago wishes to grace its lake front with a monument to its packing industry. It employs the services of a sculptor who molds a noble group containing a cow, a bull and a calf. The work is done beautifully, and against the evening sky the bronze animals stand out with a lifelike quality that marks the sculptor as a master of his art. But someone gets an idea. He sees an opening for a little realistic touch the sculptor has overlooked. Obtaining the necessary supplies at the stockyards, he substitutes real tails for the bronze tails on the three animals, and adorns the heads of the bull and the cow with real horns in place of the bronze ones.

No one can deny that this will add realism to the sculptor's work. A real tail must of necessity look more like a tail than one made of bronze; and no sculptor can make bronze horns that look as real as real horns. But, somehow or other, as the bronze bovine family looked out across the lake in the evening light, there would be something incongruous about the gently waving tails, something that did not fit into the picture even if the tails were kept fresh.

Wagging-Tongue Entertainment . . .

SO YOU will see what I mean when I say that for nine years a rear tail has been wagging the bronze bull. To get out of my metaphorical stride before I lose my way in a bovine anatomical maze, I will dismiss the tail and call it the tongue of the screen and defy you to contradict me when I state that wagging its tongue has been the chief activity of the screen since it was given a tongue to wag. My prediction was based upon my conviction that the public would not pay enough for wagging-tongue entertainment to justify the film industry in abandoning a business which had made it prosperous and embarking upon another which meant the manufacturing of a totally different line of goods. You see, my prediction was based upon what I was convinced were things as they ought to be, and not on things as they have turned out to be.

Pleading Case of Silents . . .

LET me plead the case of that sadly battered old friend of ours, the true motion picture. It was a nice old thing; quiet, soothing, pleasant, easy to take, appealing to our emotions through our visual sense.

Its place has been taken by a noisy, chattering, busy-body which appeals to our intellects through our aural sense. You see, there is a lot of difference between things as they used to be and things as they are. I do not argue that there is no place for the talkie which has pushed aside the motion picture. Even in my poor, battered prediction I admitted that much, although I erred somewhat in estimating the relative quantities of the two forms which would constitute our future supply of screen entertainment. And before going farther, I will confess I like talkies. I see one almost every night, see it when it is hot off the cinematic griddle, before its duplicates are scattered throughout the country to bring money into film theatre box-offices. It is my business to see them. I write about them. And I fortify myself to withstand their assault on my sensibilities. The one I saw last night, I write about this morning. In the afternoon I loaf more or less; perhaps visit a studio set, and in the evening I drive gently to a film theatre, do not pay to get in, defy the new picture to do its worst.

Music In the Old Days...

AND how about you, if you are not connected with pictures? You probably do not train as I do. You make your living in a different way. You plead a case in court, sell shirts, visit patients, mend shoes. Serious business, this one of making a living; requires all you can put into it. If you are not more or less tired when you knock off and go home, you have not put into your job all it takes to make you successful. But we assume you do and that at night you desire some entertainment of a restful sort. First, let us recall how your desire was met when pictures were silent. In place of the noises which had infected your day, you heard only music softly played, so softly played, so unobtrusive, you were not conscious of it, were unaware that while all your attention was on what your eyes were seeing, your weariness was being brushed away by the music which only your emotions heard.

Imagination Given Rein...

YOU were seeing shadows gliding silently across the screen. Only your imagination was functioning fully. It transformed the shadows into people, made you hear the vow of love the hero whispered into the ear of the heroine, made you hear also the siren of the ambulance, the clang of the fire engine, the discharge of the gun in the murderer's hand. And when you read on the screen the printed words the heroine was saying, your imagination made you hear a voice which matched her beauty, which harmonized with the personality your imagination had created. The silent picture, you see, did not entertain you. It was too unreal to do that, was just a series of photographs, flat, lifeless, parading past your eyes. You entertained yourself by allowing your imagination to translate the photographs in terms of reality. But that was yesterday.

You Buy Noise Now...

TODAY you still are busy making a living, still tired when you knock off and go home. On your way your nerves are frayed afresh by the clang of the street car you ride in or drive past, the scream of an ambulance siren, the backfire of an automobile, by all the loud beating of a city's pulse. But you are used to it and are unaware of the nerve-fraying process. It is part of life's routine, not such an indifferent part, however, as to keep you from applauding the efforts of public spirited citizens who head movements to suppress unnecessary noise and of the scientists who are seeking means to make life less clamorous. However, to get back to you and your evening after a tough day at your job. You seek a picture house, and the chance is good that when you bought your ticket you bought also the clang of the street car, the scream of the ambulance siren. All in the cause of their art, picture producers can all the noises we are trying to suppress and sell them to us as entertainment. Not that they offer the street noises as something entertaining in itself; they depend upon fortissimo swing bands and Martha Raye to present noise for its own sake.

Producer a Kind Person...

THE clang of the street car has a deeper significance. It is educational, informative. In real life you associate the clang with the car; the producer wants you to know it is a street car; without the clang you would not know it; hence the clang. The producer, you see, does not make pictures for his own entertainment. If he did, there would be no clang, for he is an Intellectual Person, who, after only three or four good looks, could tell you it was a street car, even if it were clangless. But you are a Poor Moron. You must have the clang. And when in the picture you see a man put a cigar in his mouth, feel in one pocket after another for something, then ask a companion for something, get it, make it burn, light his cigar—would all that mean anything to you, you Poor Fish? Now don't pretend it would. The producer will know you are lying. He must bring the scene down to your low mental level. His soundman adjusts the microphone. "Let 'er roll!" commands someone. "Action!" says the director, and he shoots the scene four or five times before saying, "Cut! Print it!" because each syllable of the line, "I say, old fellow, have you such a thing as a match?" must be uttered with meticulous precision before you will have any idea of what is going on, before you can relax and await the next speech which will bring you up in your seat again.

Gave Him Too Much Credit...

FOR one thing we must give the producer credit: He leaves you in no doubt about what is being said. Two of his players, standing with their noses almost touching, hurl verbal bombshells at one another in tones whose volume can be explained only on the presumption that he assumes you are deaf. But that is only one of the petty and irritating features of the talkie, a flaw I had not anticipated when

I gave it but one year to live. My prediction was based upon the fundamentals of the art of the screen. You will notice as you look at the screen that nothing is left to your imagination except the acceptance of photographs as real people. From there on the producer does everything for you. He talks his stories. He relegates to the background the camera as the screen's story-telling medium, making his entertainment aural instead of visual, which means that with the advent of the microphone he abandoned his established business and embarked upon another of a totally different nature. Upon my conviction that it would take him only a little time to find that out, I based my prediction that he would return to silent pictures. So you see, the only thing the matter with me as a prophet was my crediting the producer with more intelligence than he has displayed.

* * *

BRUNO USSHER AND THE EDITOR . . .

APPROACHING the matter from a purely cinematic angle, I have pleaded for years for musical interpretation of the mechanical sounds which make screen entertainment so noisy. In this *Spectator* Bruno David Ussher, our brilliant music critic whose opinions are regarded highly by all musicians who compose for the screen, approaches the same subject from the standpoint of music and arrives at precisely the same views the editor has expressed so often. His article in this issue is recommended to the careful consideration of all producers.

* * *

HIS DECISION A WISE ONE . . .

DAVE SELZNICK decided wisely when he gave up the idea of merging with one of the big producing companies and becoming just another producer shackled with the big studio routine which is responsible for so many poor pictures. The evolution of production will be towards just such physically small organizations as Dave has now in Selznick-International. The present cumbersome studio set-ups will crumble under the weight of their inefficiency and thenceforth unit production will be the rule.

* * *

WE HEAR FROM TWO HUGHS . . .

AN INTERESTING letter comes to me from Hugh E. Stoddard, a twenty-year-old *Spectator* reader. He writes that, "Silent films were before my picture-going days," but there was an early talkie which impressed him, *The Sin of Madelene Claudet*, a reshooting of which he caught recently at a downtown theatre. "I discovered that after seven years," his letter states, "the only scene I had remembered was completely devoid of dialogue. Helen Hays, as a Paris street girl, sees a drunk approaching; she hastily rouges her lips, leans against a mail box, and under a harsh glare of the street lamp, smiles up appealingly at the man. The whole scene fades in and out without a word being spoken." Not yet thirteen years of age when he first saw the picture, Hugh scarcely could have grasped the full significance of the scene, yet his mind retained it, his visual sense kept it alive for him

and made it the only scene he could remember. Surely that is an argument in favor of greater reliance on the camera as the screen's story-telling medium. Hugh remembered that one scene because its appeal was direct to his emotions and his intellect was in no way involved, because it was written in the most primitive of all languages—that which expresses itself in pictorial symbols.

Not An Attentive Reader . . .

ANOTHER letter comes in from Hugh—the mail seems to be running to Hughs—E. Ashburton, a New York reader of the *Spectator*, who good naturedly advises me to "abandon your campaign for a return to silent pictures and resign yourself to the acceptance of the more modern method of telling stories on the screen." I looked up the record of the second Hugh and discovered he is a subscriber of five years standing, and as enclosed with his letter was a check for a further extension of two years, it is logical to infer that he is satisfied with the *Spectator* as reading matter. During the five years he has been reading it, I have stated repeatedly that I do not advocate a return to silent pictures, yet a contrary conception of the *Spectator's* stand is fixed in Ashburton's mind in spite of his thirty-five-dollar investment in it as something to read. All I have pleaded for is a preponderance of such scenes as the one which made a strong impression on the thirteen-year-old boy without being designed only for thirteen-year-old intelligence. No one can challenge the statement that a picture composed wholly of such scenes, one without audible dialogue or superimposed titles, would be the perfect motion picture which would appeal to all ages and all grades of intelligence, that each viewer would get out of it what his imagination created. But the *Spectator* never has asked for such perfection. All it has asked for is the nearest approach to it consistent with sound business sense.

* * *

MUTILATING MUSICAL FAVORITES . . .

CCHESTER BAHN, writing in *Film Daily*, brings out a strong point against the mutilation of favorite stage musicals for presentation on the screen. The musical numbers in the old favorites are what the public remembers longest, yet new numbers are substituted for them in the picture versions. I quote Bahn: "As a rule, musical plays largely are identified with their tunes and lyrics; the flight o' time may erase the plot and its ramifications from memory's tablets, but the hit melodies usually persist. Why, then, discard them, with the practical assurance that the elimination will spell disappointment to countless film-goers? Further, there is this angle. In advance of the release of a musical picture, it is the accepted practice these days to resort to the radio, dance orchestras, etc. for an extensive and intensive exploitation of its song and dance numbers. Why? To sell or familiarize the tunes in advance of the picture's release. Under these circumstances, does the discarding of the well-established numbers make sense?"

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

RATHER COLDLY MECHANICAL . . .

● **TEST PILOT**; Metro release of a Victor Fleming production; Louis D. Lighton, producer; stars Clark Gable, Myrna Loy, Spencer Tracy; directed by Victor Fleming; screen play by Vincent Lawrence and Waldemar Young; original story by Frank Wead; musical score, Franz Waxman; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associate art directors, John Dettlie and Edwin B. Willis; wardrobe, Dolly Tree; photographed by Ray June; montage, Slavko Vorkapich; film editor, Tom Held. Supporting cast: Lionel Barrymore, Samuel S. Hinds, Marjorie Main, Ted Pearson, Gloria Holden, Louis Jean Heydt, Virginia Grey, Priscilla Lawson, Claudia Coleman, Arthur Aylesworth.

WHEN Clark Gable, Myrna Loy, Spencer Tracy and Lionel Barrymore appear in a picture together, that picture is important. That is what *Test Pilot* is—important—and it will revive the drooping spirit of many a box-office. It is an extraordinary physical job done with Metro's usual thoroughness. It is well written, and well directed; contains thrills, beautiful photography—has, in fact, all the ingredients, except one, which go into the making of a completely satisfactory piece of screen entertainment: It deals with perhaps the only phase of the development and advancement of aerial transportation in which the public is not interested. Testing planes is a behind-the-scenes activity, coldly scientific, performed by men who are paid well for the risks they take—a tremendously important activity, certainly, but lacking the human appeal of, for instance, an aviator's battle with a storm to carry serum to a baby whose life depends upon his getting through.

Drunkenness Stressed Too Much . . .

BUT test piloting, as well as anything else, can motivate a human story if in the telling the story is made human by enlisting our complete sympathy for its central character. In the picture Clark Gable personifies all test pilots. If we are to believe the picture, test pilots are a drunken lot, not the coldly brave heroes we would like to believe them. The successful picture is one whose story is advanced by normal impulses. In this picture too much of what happens is inspired by drunkenness. That is what spoiled it for me. I was willing to accept the technical explanations of the reasons for the various tests, even though they did not interest me, but I could not be entertained by the drinking bouts of the man who performed them. I lost interest altogether when there appeared on the screen the most atrocious bit of cutting I ever saw. Gable and Gloria Holden share what they make the outstanding scene in the picture, a beautifully done scene with powerful emotional appeal which brought tears to audience eyes and lumps to throats.

Scene Ruined by Cutting . . .

GABLE wins a \$10,000 purse at the Cleveland air races, defeating Gloria's husband who lost his life by the crashing of his plane at the end of the race. Gloria and her three children are left penniless. Gable goes to her, tells her that prior to the race he and her husband had agreed to split the purse if either won,

hands her \$5,000 in cash. Gloria knows Clark is lying, but accepts the money. In writing, directing and acting, the scene is a great cinematic moment. Before the audience has time to brush away its tears, or time even to get the whole significance of the scene, there is a sharp cut to a close shot of Gable, beastly drunk in the midst of a noisy, drinking crowd in a night club. The sudden shift in mood comes with a shock to the audience. It is a deplorable exhibition both of bad taste and a lack of picture intelligence. And in the drinking sequence there is one of the several incidents in the story which I could not understand. A representative of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce comes to the night club to greet the flyers and express his regrets for the death of Gloria's husband. He is thrown out. Something in the flyer's code might explain the action, but nothing on the screen seemed to. There were two other incidents which apparently were based on the assumption of audience familiarity with aviation traditions.

What Price Knowledge? . . .

CERTAINLY after seeing the picture I know something of the lives and activities of young men who try out planes to the end that flying can be made safer. What good the knowledge will do me, I do not know. It is a subject in which I am not interested. I go to a picture house to be entertained, not taught. If in course of being entertained I can pick up interesting knowledge, I get that much more for the price of admission, but in the case of *Test Pilot* I felt I was getting more knowledge than entertainment. Such was my reaction. Yours may be entirely different. Certainly you will see some satisfying performances. When I say Gable, Tracy and Barrymore ably sustain the high standards long since established by them, I say all that can be said by way of praise. Myrna Loy gives what in my opinion is her best performance to date. Her charming impishness is given a chance to assert itself, and she develops all the values of her emotional scenes. Marjorie Main lends brilliance to a minor role. Gloria Holden's big scene should do much to advance her career. The screen play by Waldemar Young and Vincent Lawrence contains some clever dialogue and reveals painstaking effort to be technically authentic. There is a great deal of astonishing photography in the picture,

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the camera work of Ray June being both dramatic and artistic. The montage effects by Slavko Vorkapich also add to the visual appeal of the picture. The whole undertaking from a physical standpoint is vastly to the credit of Producer Louis Lighton, but I am sorry he did not permit his writers to substitute something else for the drunkenness which weakens the story.

STORY TOLD INTELLIGENTLY . . .

● **KING OF THE NEWSBOYS**; Republic picture and release; associate producer and director, Bernard Vorhaus; original story by Samuel Ornitz and Horace McCoy; screen play by Louis Weitzenkorn and Peggy Thompson; photographed by Jack Marta; supervising editor, Murray Seldeen; film editor, Ernest Nims; art direction, John Victor Mackay; musical director, Alberto Colombo; costumes by Irene Saltern. Cast: Lew Ayres, Helen Mack, Alison Skipworth, Victor Varconi, Sheila Bromley, Alice White, Horace MacMahon, William Benedict, Victor Ray Cooke, Jack Pennick, Mary Kornman, Gloria Rich, Oscar O'Shea.

AN INTERESTING social drama worked out most capably by Producer-Director Bernard Vorhaus, a young fellow who has had considerable picture experience in England and who in *King of the Newsboys* displays enough skill to justify the prediction that he will make an important place for himself in Hollywood production when he gets a chance at larger pictures than this one. The Republic film provides entertainment which is quite good enough for any audience, has been given a complete production and a capable cast, and tells its story without any loss of forward movement. Vorhaus directs intelligently. He makes his people talk like human beings, and permits none of them to give an exhibition of acting. He also reveals an understanding of story values and the placing of emphasis. Lew Ayres plays a boy born and raised in the slums and whose desire to amount to something ultimately becomes an accomplished fact. For a time he believes he is in love with a girl of the smart society set, but ultimately he goes back to his first love.

Some Good Performances . . .

AYRES, a favorite of mine ever since his first appearance on the screen, gives an impressive and well sustained performance. Always suggesting shyness and reserve, he nevertheless scores his points with sufficient emphasis to dominate his scenes. I was glad to see Helen Mack again. She plays the slum girl and gives a really powerful performance. I never have been able to understand her neglect by the major studios. Years ago I saw her in a brief dramatic role in which she displayed ability as a dramatic actress equalled by few girls in pictures, yet she continually is ignored for parts which are given to others who do not possess half her ability. Sheila Bromley is another who registers strongly in this Republic picture. That clever veteran, Alison Skipworth, also is superb, particularly in a court-room sequence which, under Vorhaus' brilliant direction, is the emotional high-spot of the production. Another of my favorites, Victor Varconi, who always gives a good performance, scores heavily.

SWING, ALL THE WAY THROUGH . . .

● **COLLEGE SWING**; Paramount; producer, Lewis E. Gensler; director, Raoul Walsh; story idea, Ted Lesser; adaptation, Frederick Hazlitt Brennan; screen play, Walter De Leon, Francis Martin; songs, Frank Loesser and Burton Lane, Manning Sherwin, Hoagy Carmichael; photographer, Victor Milner; music director, Boris Morros; music adviser, Arthur Franklin; dance director, LeRoy Prinz; film editor, LeRoy Stone; assistant director, Roland Asher. Cast: George Burns, Gracie Allen, Martha Raye, Bob Hope, Edward Everett Horton, Florence George, Ben Blue, Betty Grable, Jackie Coogan, John Payne, Cecil Cunningham, Robert Cummings, E. C. "Skinny" Ennis, Slate Brothers, Bob Mitchell and the St. Brendan's Chorus.

WHETHER the picture will kill swing or swing will kill the picture, I do not even guess at, but if you are one of those to whom the reason for swing music has become apparent through the noise it makes, then you probably will be entertained by this Paramount offering. I should have assigned someone else to review it. I am too old for the job; I like the waltz and musical music. Swing is so far away from what I like that it does more than fail to entertain me—it annoys me, makes me mad. It is all right for a madman, but not for a mad man. If you are one of the madmen who can do the jumping up and down essential to the complete enjoyment of swing music, by all means see *College Swing*. You will enjoy it. Paramount has provided it with a complete and attractive production and a large and competent cast. I have been reading quite a lot lately about the dwindling popularity of swing, which makes me doubt Paramount's wisdom in giving it such an expensive wake if it really is passing out.

Imagination Not Equal to It . . .

AMONG my cinema convictions is one that every picture, even the goofiest, should have a connected story, straight-line continuity of interest to keep audience attention alive through the interpolated distractions of song and dance numbers—a story which the indulgent viewer, after getting the feel of it, will let his imagination make a bluff at accepting as something which really could happen. In the case of *College Swing* my imagination refused to cooperate with my desire to be entertained. I was bored even though at times I was amused. Cleverness, even in the most absurd moments, is entertaining, but there is not enough cleverness in the picture to make it continuously interesting. My imagination was not sufficiently complaisant to concede the story could happen. Every time I see Martha Raye's name in a cast, my hopes are high that at last she is tamed sufficiently to

ANTIQUE STEINWAY PIANO

... SQUARE TYPE ...

Box No. 98, Hollywood Spectator

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give her real talent a chance to assert itself, but in *College Swing* she again screams her songs and gives her usual wild performance. Edward Everett Horton, Bob Hope, Gracie Allen, George Burns, Ben Blue and some others do good work. John Payne, an agreeable, promising young fellow with a pleasing singing voice, and Florence George, an attractive blonde with a nice personality and singing ability, share a pleasant romance.

MURDER FOR A CAUSE . . .

● **INTERNATIONAL CRIME**; Grand National release of a Max and Arthur Alexander production; associate producer, Alfred Stern; screen play by Jack Natteford; based on "The Fox Hound," a magazine story by Maxwell Grant; director, Charles Lamont; photographed by Marcel Picard; art direction, Ralph Berger; musical direction, Dr. Edw. Killeney; sound recording, Glenn Rominger; sound supervision, A. E. Kaye; film editor, Charles Hinkle; production manager, Harold Lewis. Cast: Rod LaRocque, Astrid Allwyn, Thomas Jackson, Oscar O'Shea, Wm. Von Brincken, William Pawley, Walter Bonn, William Moore, Lou Hearn, Tenen Holtz, John St. Polis, Lloyd Whitlock, Jack Baxley.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

EVIDENTLY one of a series of projected murder mysteries, Grand National's *International Crime* recounts the endeavors of a newspaper columnist to solve a murder which has been motivated by international diplomacy, a certain group of foreigners being bent on preventing an American loan to a European country. The columnist, a debonair fellow known as "The Shadow" and played by Rod LaRocque, is something of an amateur detective, devoting much of his column and his radio addresses to unravelling crime cases which have quite stumped the slow-witted police. *International Crime* is a middling film, grist for the double bills, but satisfactory for that function. The action is sprightly and there is a fair amount of suspense. Some of the situations are handled in an arbitrary, rather implausible manner; some of the humor is weak, especially the columnist's stomping on his secretary's foot to produce from her a frenzied writhing, which he interprets as an "attack" before the persons from whom he would disassociate himself. The picture will hold the interest of an average audience, however.

Former Star Pleases . . .

ROD LaROCQUE is well cast as the detection-minded columnist. In some of his whimsical moments he is amusing and likeable. Some of the time, unfortunately, the hand of the director can be seen in his work, which is a little stilted and reveals a lack of grasp. Perhaps later he will loosen up in his playing and slide into the part, at which time the role might attain for him considerable favor. Astrid Allwyn is pert and volatile and teams well with LaRocque. Her performance, however, is sometimes detracted from by unflattering photography. Most of the shots in the film are up to standard, though, and a montage sequence appearing in one portion is very well done. Other competent performances are given by Thomas Jackson, Oscar O'Shea and Wm. Von Brincken. Director Charles Lamont has handled his

people with pains and resourcefulness, turning in a creditable job on his assignment. The screen play, by Jack Natteford, was based on a *Shadow Magazine* yarn by Maxwell Grant.

CAMERA WORKS AT LAST . . .

● **BROKEN BLOSSOMS**; produced by Julius Hagen; directed by Hans Brahm; adapted from Thomas Burke's story, "The Chink and the Child" and D. W. Griffith's masterpiece; cameraman, Curt Couran; film editor, Ralph Kemplen; production supervisor, Bernard Vorhaus; art director, James Carter; sound recorder, Baynham Honri; musical director, W. L. Trytel. Cast: Dolly Haas, Emlyn Williams, Arthur Margetson, Ernest Sefton, C. V. France, Basil Radford, Edith Sharpe, Ernest Jay, Bertha Belmore, Gibb McLaughlin, Donald Calthrop, Kathleen Harrison, Kenneth Villiers, Jerry Verno.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

NOT since John Ford told the story of *The Inform-er* with a camera and not sound equipment, has this instrument been used with such telling cinematic force as in the newest version of *Broken Blossoms*. The picture, to begin with, deserved a better fate than it received at the hands of the Marcal Theatre patrons. *Broken Blossoms*, produced by Julius Hagen for Imperial Films, is one of the great *motion* pictures. However, intermittent bursts of laughter at the unorthodox use of the camera indicated that the audience did not appreciate the offering. I may be a little extravagant in my praise, but this because I thoroughly enjoyed the picture. It has been so long since I have seen a director use a camera correctly and intelligently that this admitted remake of an earlier film is like a breath of fresh wind.

Dedicated to D. W. Griffith . . .

THERE could have been no finer tribute than the opening dedication which honored D. W. Griffith. It was he, Hollywood will recall, who gave to the industry and to the camera its syntax, its grammar and its resultant force. He used the camera as it should be used; he laid down rules that have been followed by the greatest names in the business: Pabst, Lang, Lubitsch, Stroheim, Frank Lloyd, Chaplin and others. Cameraman Curt Courant and Director Hans Brahm live up to the high level of their dedication. The moments when Battling Burrows is beating Lucy insensate, the camera flashes to a wide door swinging in the relentless wind. Each slam of the door against a small but sturdy birch tree corresponds to a blow from Burrow's whip. The audience shuddered when the birch snapped and swayed to the earth, and the screams of pain within the house had ceased. The soft falling snow and the low whine of the wind that followed as a lull punctuated the horror of the preceding scene. There are so many fine touches in this picture that it would be impossible to list them all. Let it suffice to say that the use of parallels and symbolism is masterful to say the least.

Dolly Haas Real Actress . . .

DOLLY HAAS is a combination of the best of Luise Rainer and Elizabeth Bergner. Her portrayal of the slavey Lucey, browbeaten by her father and her environment, finding ecstatic joy in the love

of curio shopkeeper Chen, is on a par with Luise Rainer's portrayal of O-lan and Elizabeth Bergner's performance in *Escape Me Never*. With no attempt to deprecate the performances of the other two actresses, I must say that Dolly Haas obtains her dramatic effects with a sincerity that employs no tricks. Her performance, in brief, is all sincerity, clean and thorough. I shall never forget that scene in the closet when her father bashes the door in with a poker, and Dolly, numb with terror, suddenly rushes back and forth with the narrow confines of her hiding place. The audience laughed, I recall. But not because of the dramatics of the situation, not because the scene struck it as ludicrous, but for emotional release. Few things I have seen on the screen have made me so feel the power of celluloid.

Music Background Important . . .

IF D. W. GRIFFITH'S *Broken Blossoms* is to be adjudged one of the screen's finest achievements, I pause to wonder how much greater it might have been with the musical background furnished for the present effort by W. L. Trytel. Music runs through the entire picture, punctuates the drama and gives the picture an importance that it might not otherwise have. But as important as the music is, I feel that it is second in importance to the absence of dialogue. Director Hans Brahms, evidently taking a page from the work of D. W. Griffith, was sparing in the use of dialogue, left as much as he could to the imagination of the spectators.

Who Is Right? . . .

NO MATTER what my personal reactions to *Broken Blossoms*, the Marcal audience laughed, a fact which I cannot overlook if I am to be honest. Standing out in the lobby after the picture I believe it was Konrad Bercovici whom I overheard. I did not mean to overhear another's conversation, but I could not help hearing him say: "It was a work of art. But hardly suitable for this kind of an audience." If the author's observation is correct, if *Broken Blossoms*, as a type, has little appeal for the people who really count, those who pay across the till, then these words are rather futile. I believe, however, that the picture might have had a larger appeal, seemed less ludicrous if substantial cutting had been done on the rather long love sequences between Lucy and Chen. D. W. Griffith himself used to cut love sequences in the following manner: he would call in a series of preview audiences to watch only the love sequences. He would then watch for audience laughs, and cut the picture precisely at that point where he encountered the first faint chuckle. That is real editing. For after all, audiences laugh at love sequences, not because they are silly, but because of the same emotional release cited above.

And the Theme . . .

ANOTHER comment which I overheard in the lobby from two ladies was that the picture was too depressing. We must realize, naturally, that audiences seek entertainment, and the picture of squalor,

brutality and futility that we find in *Broken Blossoms* is hardly a happy background. Let me say parenthetically that the fact that Director Brahm was able to obtain this effect is a high compliment. His picture of squalor is realistic beyond description. I feel that the theme of *Broken Blossoms*, the story itself, does not live up to the excellence of the acting, directing and technical work. The story is a rather sordid and unhappy one. I feel, too, that the efforts of those responsible for this picture might have been better exerted on a worthier theme.

STORY SPOILS IT . . .

● **CALL OF THE YUKON**; Republic; associate producer, Armand Schaefer; director, B. Reaves Eason; co-director, John T. Coyle; story, James Oliver Curwood; screen play, Gertrude Orr, William Bartlett; photographer, Ernest Miller; music director, Alberto Colombo; film editor, Howard O'Neill. Cast: Richard Arlen, Beverly Roberts, Lyle Talbot, Mala, Garry Owen, Ivan Miller, James Lono, Emory Parnell, Billy Dooley, Al St. John, Anthony Hughes, Nina Campana.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

WHAT the *Spectator* usually seeks in an out-of-doors melodrama is a minimum of plot and a maximum of action. And this is exactly what *Call of the Yukon* supplies. A maximum of action, and an annoying minimum of plot action that should have been even less. The action of the story is supplied by a group of mute actors, which once again indicates strongly the efficacy of doing away with dialogue. Swift Lightning, a wolf dog and leader of a pack of wild dogs; Firefly, his domesticated mate; Buck, a giant St. Bernard dog; Toughie and Roughie, two bear cubs; and Winkey, a raven, the only member of the animal cast that was assigned definite lines. These named actors and reindeer, polar bears and other wild and tame dogs complete the plot-motivating portion of the cast. It is when we consider the mortal members of this story that we come to difficulties. Richard Arlen as a tough Alaskan trapper, Beverly Roberts as a novelist in search of an arctic thrill, and Lyle Talbot as the smoothie Alaskan had too much to do.

Story Holds Back . . .

THE plot is briefly concerned with the struggle between suave Lyle and roughneck Richard for the hand of Beverly. This fight is reflected in the struggle between Swift Lightning and Buck for the favors of collie Firefly. A litter of puppies, Firefly by Swift Lightning, supplies the climax as the trapper takes the novelist in his arms at story's end. However, the scenarists might have taken a leaf from the animal actors and cut down on the dialogue assigned to the threesome. Some of the worst cliches of the silent era are resorted to, and brought occasional guffaws from the sophisticated members of the Forum audience. Nor was the motivation of the first fight between the two men convincing. The girl turns from the roughneck, repulsed by his brutality. Yet,

he goes out in the rain, rescues Swift Lightning from certain death—and all is mellow Alaskan sunshine.

Cutter's Victory . . .

MUCH of the background and action was actually shot on location. It is to the credit of Film Editor Howard O'Neill that the story is so carefully and so well paired. There were instances when the snow shots and the back-lot shots paired perfectly, and there was an easy transition without any jerky changes. The process shots stood up well, as did the exteriors. John Victor Mackay's sets deserve commendation for their authenticity. I believe Alberto Colombo's music had much to do with making the picture as exciting and as moving as it did. There is a happy selection of background music that is pointed without being obtrusive. With the animal actors taking a major portion of the screen time, and there being no dialogue at those times, this picture afforded an opportunity for studying the effect of music against a background of silence. Director Colombo comes through with flying colors.

Pre-Production Scenes . . .

DIRECTOR REAVES EASON worked in perfect harmony with Director Norman Dawn, dispatched to the north for his location exteriors. Director Dawn supplied his southern teammate with a rich mine of good action shots. Some of the most exciting I have seen in a long time are those concerned with setting the wild dog and wolf trap, baited with reindeer. And the matching of those shots with studio work is masterful, indeed, to the full credit of Director Eason. *Call of the Yukon* is almost a documentary in appearance and spirit. Had it been spared some of the human plot I believe it would have emerged as a much stronger picture.

CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by
RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD
of
MABEL KEEFER

A RECENT issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* carries an excellent editorial having to do with the unity of history, and the fact that we go on making the same mistakes over and over again because we are incapable of remembering the past. Among other things, the editorial says: "When the movies were young, hopes were high that they would revolutionize education by showing things rather than talking about them." It then stresses the fact that millions see the screen reproductions of history, and asks: "But do these millions see them as Hollywood at a masked ball, or is the audience made conscious of the continuity of their lives, with all that has gone before?" I understand that when Robert Joseph tried to talk to that dizzy blonde, Mehitable, about it, she said, "Whadda ya mean, 'revolootionize education'? What's the movies got to do with education? They

don't make pitchers to learn ya things! My, my! Don't ya ever read movin' pitcher trade magazines?"

* * *

SOMETHING that I envy screen actors: The opportunity to see themselves as others see them. All my life I have wanted to watch myself go by. Such an experience should be an invaluable guide to future conduct, and I have no doubt it would be charged with surprises—some not so pleasant.

* * *

UNDER the caption, *Give Age Its Opportunity* (March 26 issue of the *Spectator*), Editor Beaton makes a good point when he says that picture producers are not making the most of old-men and old-women story possibilities. The type of story he suggests would give scope for wit and mellow humor, and has a fairy story flavor that should find favor with all ages. Most elderly people, I think, would like to play the part of fairy godfather or godmother in real life, and would, therefore, thoroughly enjoy screen entertainment of that sort. (Have I ever heard of a fairy godfather? Anyway, we could use one on the screen.) The romance of the story, if served with the right sauce, would furnish appeal for the younger audience. Mr. Beaton's idea of an elderly man returning from somewhere with great wealth, and making his drab niece into a glittering personality, fairly drips with human interest. There are people who will rise up to say no purpose will be served with such a fairy-story-like picture. Is that so? How do they know how many rich uncles will be reminded of their drab nieces when they see that picture, and proceed to do something about it? But please, Mr. Beaton, don't make the niece glitter too much. Have her uncle help her to develop poise and a keen sense of humor, with ability to scintillate on occasion. Then, bring on your snooty young man and let him watch her mow 'em down.

* * *

LISTENING to Maxine Sullivan swinging *Loch Lomond*, I'll take any old road that will get me out of earshot.

* * *

RECIPE for happiness: Take some love and some work, and mix with fun. Then, take two hearts that beat as one; be sure they share all hopes and fears, all laughter and all tears. It matters not about the weather, if you keep two hearts together; it's the things you share that bless, and make for happiness. *Chorus*: So-o-o, we'll love and work and play together, and we won't give a hang about the weather. We'll share all our joys and sorrows, and hope for glad tomorrows. When this queer world makes us want to sigh, we'll know there's someone standing by; and we won't give a hang about the weather, if we can love and work and play together.

* * *

HOPE to goodness directors were listening in when Dr. Ussher said, "When boy meets girl keep the orchestra at home." (March 26 issue of the *Spectator*.)

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

MUCH of the sound and the fury which goes with the calling of a strong-willed airplane test pilot has gone into the making of MGM's flight-romance *Test Pilot*. There is near to no music in the production except for the title, and I cannot disagree with Director Victor Fleming who evidently wanted to make a realistic picture. Frank Waxman has provided a good title sequence. It is suggestive of the curious, dart-like motion of a plane as it zig-zags up and down a field of vision. The short sequence has driving energy until it relaxes into something gay and bounding to characterize a girls-girls-and-still-more-girls-background for the hero. A fragment of night club music is not relevant "musically". Just the right sort. Of course non-melodic, or shall I say non-thematic music could be used in certain scenes, such as the tension-charged test light when the huge bomber is pushed higher and higher, when it buckles, goes into a tail-spin and ends in a delayed crash. Choosing a term at random, I might call such tone-intensification of certain crucial situations psychological pressure music. It would be "reaction" rather than "action" music. The unspoken "reactions" could become articulate.

Saying It With Themes . . .

SOME day a film composer will ask the film director of an aviation picture to let him tell part of the story with musical themes. There would be a flight theme, sharp, angular. It would be put through increasing "revolutions" from low-toned to higher toned instruments, as first one motor and propeller start to chug and gain continuity. The same theme would follow fugally as the other motor is started up and perhaps a third and fourth one until the fugal treatment melts into one tremendous unison utterance when all airplane motors drone, one indistinguishable from the other. The high string instruments, including harps, could "shine" the gleaming aureoles of racing propeller blades, while low wind instruments, brass and percussion would complete the aural picture of poised motor power. High percussion and high brass would intensify the second as the plane leaps forward, gathering momentum and elevation. This may seem high-brow, but is nothing of the kind, as any good musician will agree if he has heard such pieces as Honegger's *Pacific 23*, the tone-picture of a fast train, or Mossoloff's *Iron Foundry*. Fugues have been used in operas by Kurt Weill, by Alban Berg and others. After all, what is a fugue, but merely a dramatic device?

Sound Instead of Noise . . .

SUCH an instrumentation effect still would be, to my thinking, "reaction" music, which as a rule should prove more interesting and more impressive than mere action music. It could sound magnificent, and not merely from a "functional" point of listening, so as not to say viewpoint, although many people

see with their ears as well as with their eyes. The actual racket and roar of an airplane being tuned up, is nothing unfamiliar to a majority of people. If they have not been to an airfield in person, then they have been by way of news reels or other flight pictures. So what? The roar of the actual sound recorded around Fleming's airplanes is nothing new to his audience. It is not any newer than the photographed sprays of dust whipped up by his propellers. It is just a lot of dull sound which conveys extremely little (if anything) of the tension and daring of the knights of the air. It adds nothing to the emotional picture of Clark Gable's chaser of storms . . . and of "skirts". Mere crashing and shearing sound of the actual crack-up does not tell all that has been cracked and shorn. But MGM has ingenuous composers and orchestrators, thanks to Music Director Nathaniel Finston, who could have done a potent piece of *emotional* as well as merely audible *under-scoring*.

What Value Realism? . . .

WHAT price realism? Or, I might ask, why sell out illusion? The actual roar of engines is not necessary to persuade the public that these are real planes for which MGM has gone to large expense. Everyone knows that the plane driven by Gable is not driven by the screen idol, also that the smoke coming from it is not that of fire, but from a harmless smoke generator. Everyone knows that Spencer Tracy gasped his last a number of times until the director was wholly satisfied, and the cameramen had recorded his last moments from every possible camera angle of visual vantage. I have no desire for a Rosary in the manner of Nevin, when Tracy as the good old Gunner "goes West". I am thinking of another incident, when Myrna Loy, as the flyer's wife, cries out over the suspense and fear she must bear. All day, every day the clock ticks to her the warning: "Still living, still living." Today she is still a flyer's wife. Tomorrow she may be his widow. This offers a poignant musical subject, again one of rhythmic more than of melodic nature.

Super-Realism of Sound . . .

HOW pregnantly it could be brought in, when she watches the air races or the yet more hazardous flights on the army airfield. The film, thanks to Myrna Loy, Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy, carries great emotional weight. And yet, I believe that the use of musical motifs would make certain scenes psychologically and emotionally still stronger. The "tick-ing motif," for instance, would indicate her state of anxiety as she watches her husband-flyer. That motif would beat irregularly, fainter and become inaudible when she faints, overcome with fear. It ticks again questioningly, louder as she regains consciousness. It could become a "Where Is He?" theme when, following the victory celebration, he is "lost" on a four-day spree. In other words, orchestration and

rhythm, as sound-painting and as a pulse of emotional life, could be employed with super-realistic result, when mere visual realism, mere actual noise would be obvious because told already by motion and occurrences visible to the eye.

No Sobstuff Wanted . . .

IT GOES without saying that I am glad Fleming, Finston and Waxman kept out the musical stuff. Spencer Tracy dies a good death without the glycerine tears of an invisible orchestra suddenly striking up in the wilds of mountainous no-man's land. Thanks, gentlemen, thanks. But, there might be two related themes for the dual nature exhibited by the briskly brittle Myrna Loy, who can also be so tender. Those two themes could ride with Clark Gable as he makes off, bitter and disappointed, pushing his plane through more clouds until one theme tells him to turn around and claim the starry-eyed girl he saw first. The MGM picture is stark and arresting with actuality, such as during the air race scenes, or at the army's aviation proving grounds. But what is ultimately the measure of conviction by which this or that approaches actuality in a motion picture? Surely not merely the perception of the retina of the human eye, checked in the time of a split-second with the stored-up memory records of what has been seen or read. The measure of cinematic actuality comes with emotional reaction, so they might be held in mute suspense. But suspense certainly is emotion. And "reaction music", voicing reactions of the characters on the screen, anticipating those of the audience in the theatre, can help to hoist a picture to a greater box-office altitude record.

Joy of Listening . . .

THERE is not much music either in RKO's *Joy of Living*, but what there is, is of first order, thanks to Jerome Kern of song fame, and his most admirable collaborator, Russell Bennett, whose opening music and orchestral settings match the Kern style perfectly. When commenting on the honor selections made by the Academy a few weeks ago, I contended that at least ten songs could be named which merited this distinction far more than the Hawaiian song chosen. I had first of all Kern's songs in mind which he had composed for *High, Wide and Handsome*. The principle on which the Academy based its musical findings—a mass vote—is about as good as the assumption that the person with the largest ears would be the best judge of music. By which token, the elephant would rank higher than the nightingale. In short, *Joy of Living* contains several delightful melodies and it would be difficult to choose between the lullaby, the love song, *Tonight Let Me Look At You* (employed again later on), and the cleverly amusing radio song with its accelerated tempo.

Songs for Song's Sake . . .

THERE has never been a question in my mind that Jerome Kern is America's foremost song-melodist in the lighter vein. This does not imply that the gentleman cannot express genuine, deeply rooted feeling.

To prove the point, I do not have to go back as far as *Show Boat*. His music for *Cat and the Fiddle* or *Music In the Air*, again *High, Wide and Handsome*, contain ample substantiation of my claim. If the dance band leaders, radio singers, and the publishers themselves were not obsessed by the idea that the latest song is the best for business, still more music of Kern would be heard in ball rooms, on the air and at home. But there is little discrimination now between song-composer and tune-smiths. The former is an artist, the latter merely an artisan and often little more than a musical tailor and dealer in second-hand clothes. Kern, in the first place, is careful about his lyrics, i.e., his acceptance of them. But before he turns to that he makes a careful study of the play, and the personality in the play who voices his songs. Hence they possess fitness of situation and characterize individually the particular personality to whom they are given in the play. The verses by Dorothy Fields, too, are engaging and thus enhance Kern's songs for *Joy of Living*.

Paging Miss Irene Dunne . . .

ICANNOT say anything better about the singing of Irene Dunne in *Joy of Living* than that voice. Song delivery and general musicality reflect the very meaning of the picture title. Excellent, adroit and natural actress which she is, she is almost the only thespian before the camera of whom it would be unfair to say that she is an actress first and secondly a singer, or vice versa. Of course, there are singers from the Metropolitan Opera on the Hollywood roster who possess voices of a different calibre. But I could name several who sing not as well, nor with the distinctive charm of Irene Dunne. She uses her voice with vocal artistry, but she remembers that she is not giving a costume recital. It is difficult for me to understand why this soprano is not featured more in screen operettas, or, for that matter, why the so-called legitimate stage does not borrow her for musical comedy engagements. The songs in *Joy of Living* are nicely fitted into the play, but I would have liked it better if even the string accompaniment had been omitted in the lullaby. Why bring an orchestral background into a children's nursery? The glockenspiel sound of the toy piano suited the melodic character of Kern's melody. And I believe it would have been sufficient.

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Stage and Films Distinct Arts

By Bert Harlen

ONE of the greatest handicaps to the health and growth of the American theatre, and a handicap equally as great, if not greater, to the development of the motion picture, is the confusion in the public mind, as well as in the minds of theatrical and film producers, as to the artistic values that each medium, by its very nature, is best able to express, and as to the respective techniques which should be employed to create those values. For each art has within itself the power to say certain things which are not within the scope of the other; and the two art mediums, therefor, should be considered as distinct. This distinction, however, is not clearly defined, if recognized at all, in the minds of most theatre-goers. The habitual motion picture patron, when he sits before a stage production, tends to look for the values he is accustomed to seeing on the screen. This accounts for the frequent dissatisfaction such persons experience with the theatre, for the oft-heard complaints of "lack of intimacy", "lack of action", and the like. They go to the theatre looking for the wrong things.

Films Can Express Much . . .

SIMILARLY, devotees of the theatre who take a supercilious attitude toward the films are failing to appreciate the many splendid ideas and emotions which are being expressed by the motion pictures, to some extent even in mediocre ones. Rarely does one see a screen show in which there is not some arresting pattern flashed upon the screen, some bit of movement which takes on an indefinable significance or beauty because of its being accompanied by music or vocal tones. Yet pictures in general are not made half as stimulating, emotionally or intellectually, as they could be, because most of the people who produce them are also lacking in clearly defined concepts as to the nature of the medium with which they deal, confusing it with the older dramatic medium. Some day the great difference between the two mediums will be so firmly established that audiences will not think of accepting on the screen what they accept, more or less, as entertainment today, nor will producers be so naive as to put the current brand of filmic material on the screen. But this understanding, I dare say, will evolve slowly. In the meantime both the screen and the stage must weather present conditions.

Poetry Is Goal of Art . . .

THE ultimate objective of any art is to invest spectators with an elevating and illuminating spirit, which is brought about through their being stimulated by the feeling and ideas conveyed by the art object. This spirit might be called, as well as any thing else, poetry, using the term in a broad sense, of course, and not merely in a literary one. Much of the poetry of a race is imbedded in its literature,

and it is for this reason that the term is commonly associated with literature. That most of our finest emotions and concepts are contained in our literary heritage is due to the fact that man for so many centuries has been largely dependent upon spoken and written words to express himself and to maintain social relations with his fellows. Fine expression has been attained in the other arts during centuries past, but for various reasons, social and economic, these arts were able to touch and influence the lives of but small numbers of the great masses of the world. Thus it is that the emotions and concepts which are nearest to our daily lives, which play the greatest part in moulding them, can be found to have roots in our literature. Seldom does one refer to a picture or a statue in stressing a point of discussion, but our daily speech is full of mottoes, proverbs, phrases from verse and drama of the past.

Comes a Great Medium . . .

THE visual arts, excepting possibly architecture, played little part in influencing public thought, contributed little to mass thinking, until the advent of the printing press. The printed and illustrated sheet, together with the slow rise of mass intelligence, and the spreading of cultural advantages brought about by the growth of democracy, have brought the arts into closer relationship with the life of the average man. Invention again opened the gates to greater vistas for the masses of the world with the perfection, during the present century, of a new medium of visual expression, the motion picture, more vast in scope of expression and in the capacity for carrying messages to multitudes than any in the world's history. Its power, however, like that of any other art, was dependent on but one kind of appeal, in this case a visual one. Music enhanced it because of the strange relationship between the elements of the two—rhythm, emotional surge, and the like, which we need not to digress to discuss here.

Then Came Sound . . .

OUR point is this: the silent motion picture *was* an art medium, with properties which could be moulded by a single individual into an harmonious, significant whole. The cinema, however, was just beginning to develop into a rich medium of expression when sound equipment was contrived and the mammoth horns placed behind the screen. That the addition of sound to the shadows on the screen meant a shift in values; that a new form of entertainment was supplanting the old; that, where the silent picture had presented the spectator with a mythical dream-world, remote and yet appealing with directness and force to his emotions and his fancy, the talking picture gave to the players a new concreteness, a greater individuality—these were facts which few producers or other cinema workers

fully appreciated, and, incidentally, are only beginning to appreciate. But they *did* know that speech had been a factor of the stage, and consequently they resorted at once to that medium for methods and for workers.

Sound Alters Values . . .

ADDED to the screen, then, was the spoken word, comprising within itself so much of the poetry of the race. But a discrepancy arose here—the screen continued to emphasize the visual element. It was what the players *did* rather than what they *said* which had first claim to our attention. Sometimes, when there was little movement or intensity of light on the screen, as in a close-up with a subdued background, the words would register with the spectator in much the same way as when they were spoken from a stage. But by and large, the action on the screen tended to dissipate our concentration on the words, a dissipation made all the more pronounced by unimaginative editing—still a fault—which allowed a new shot to follow immediately upon an important line, necessitating a distracting readjustment for the eye of the spectator. It is because of this discrepancy that talking pictures have never been a medium for the expression of verbal ideas.

Lines on Stage Are Potent . . .

IBSSEN, Shaw, O'Neill, the latter at least in his pro-founder phases, have never been successfully adapted to the screen, though most producers believe it is merely because such plays lack "punch." Words spoken from the stage have rung around the world. Nora's reply to Helmer upon his refusal to compromise his honor even for a wife, in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*: "Millions of women have done so."—this and many other lines have reverberated in the social consciousness for decades. But the reader will probably be taxed to recall a single line of dialogue yet heard from the talking screen, unless it is something like the reiterated "Come up and see me sometime." What he *can* recall is the magnificence of covered wagons plodding their way through a virgin country to carry the seeds of a new civilization, the quiet, unearthly peace of whitecapped island shores, the humility, pathos, and ignorance mingled with instinctive wisdom in the face of O-Lan.

Visual Images Count in Films . . .

FOR what is predominantly telling and significant on the screen are the patterns of light and shade. Words may augment the expressive scope of the images by lending tonal effect and supplying overtones of meaning, so to speak. But the patterns are the primary means by which impressions are conveyed to an audience. It is because of this fact that the technique of the screen differs so greatly from that of the stage. What is important on the screen is not the movement of the actor *per se*, but the eventual patterns that appear on the film. When talking pictures first established themselves in public favor and there was an influx of stage players to the screen, the

writer for some time was at a loss to understand why a finely planned and executed piece of business by George Arliss, which certainly would have evoked the greatest admiration if seen on the stage, was not half as expressive on the screen as the toothy smile of some callow juvenile in a later reel. It was because a dramatic performance *per se* was not the source of interest, but rather the significant arrangements of light and shade on the screen. The juvenile, though no artist at all in the sense that Arliss was, yet provided the screen with delicate, meaningful lines and shadows and spaces of light, which, according to the principles of a visual art, were rich in association for the minds of the spectators, and therefore effective.

Where Mediums Most Differ . . .

THIS brings us to the fundamental difference between the art of the cinema and that of the stage. *On the stage it is the body of the actor that embodies the dramatic idea; on the screen it is the camera that embodies the dramatic idea.* From this it does not follow that the screen actor need possess no technique, though it may be recalled that striking performances on the screen have been given without it. An actor with a control over his voice and body and a developed sense of drama is, of course, an asset to motion picture production. Particularly is this so at the present time, for as motion pictures are now produced a player is partly his own director; he must take considerable initiative in planning "business", voice inflection, and such. Hence it is all the more important that he have ideas and executive skill along these lines.

Psychic Qualities Important . . .

BUT under more imaginative direction much of the technique which many players now in films have brought from the stage, would be unnecessary; in fact, they might be better off without it. The technique of the stage—a knowledge of how to reproduce emotional tones, carry one's body with grace, and so forth—has become established largely because of the necessity for the actor to sustain a performance through many repetitions, a requirement which does not exist in motion picture work. That much stage technique represents rather stock impressions of the human race is a point we need not discuss here. Suffice to say that such technique if of the stage, calculated to express emotions and ideas in terms of the theatre, and based upon the assumption that the actor's performance *per se* is the chief source of interest. For motion picture acting certain psychic qualities—personal force—are of much greater importance than on the stage, because of the penetrating nature of the camera.

Screen a Director's Art . . .

SO IT is that the screen is essentially not an acting art, in the sense that the stage is. Nor is it a writer's art. It is a director's art. No art medium in the past has offered so many properties which could be moulded into an artistic whole by the creative artist.

And the best of present-day directors have only scratched the surface in the development of cinematic technique, in bringing significant, stimulating patterns of light and shade to the screen, pointed in meaning and beauty by selective words and sounds. Practically all performing on the screen today is modified stage acting. The finely composed patterns which will grace pictures of the future are only hinted at in most films of the present. Directors of the future will have a grasp of the plastic arts few possess today.

Mediums Have Own Provinces . . .

IN PICTORIAL significance, then, should we look for the excellences of a film. Visual images are the means through which most of the poetry of the motion picture finds expression. The stage, on the other hand, has as its province the expression of poetry through language, making due use, of course, of movement and scenic beauty. It is, moreover, an art in which the actor, giving expression through himself to the dramatic idea, can attain to great personal accomplishment. The principal requisite of the actor before the camera, however, is personal force—or personality—encompassing vocal and physical flexibility. He is an element at the disposal of the director to incorporate into his moulding of an artistic cinematic whole.

COMMENTS FROM CLEVELAND

THE Cinema Club, Cleveland, Ohio, is composed of a large number of energetic and intelligent women who take a deep interest in motion pictures. The club publishes a bulletin which keeps members abreast of its activities, discusses pictures in open meetings and carries on other activities pertaining to screen entertainment. The bulletin is edited by Miss Bertelle M. Lyttle, a longtime reader of the *Spectator*. From her we have received recently some interesting comments which we hereunder pass on to our readers.

THE other evening Jimmie Fidler suggested omitting the credit frames at the beginning of pictures. I long have been wishing that more attention was paid to them for many of them are artistic gems. One article by one of the assistant editors of the *Spectator* is the only one I have ever found upon the subject, and none of the critics ever includes comment upon this part of the picture's art. The softly falling petals of the apple blossoms in *Maytime*, or else some actual color used in the titles, gave me an impression of soft color which has followed me in all my thoughts of this picture. Did someone say something about the value of suggestion?

* * *

WHO says that grand opera is not as much screen material as most of our stage plays? Jeanette MacDonald is the only artist who has really been allowed to offer opera properly adapted to the screen; and will any one say that *Naughty Marietta*, *Rose*

Marie, *Maytime*, and *Firefly* are not paying their way, and even paying for some follies as well? The trouble with the bringing of both the great music and the great singers to the screen, is to be found in the choice of opera and then in its adaptation. As was said of *One Night of Love*, "Here's where you take grand opera, and like it!"

* * *

BOX-OFFICE problems are different for the continental producer from those of his Hollywood brother. He must have an international market, must run the gauntlet of all the censorships. Of course, only the very best of the European pictures reach us, or else it is only those that are so different from our own that by that very difference they intrigue us. Why am I musing thus? I have just seen the French picture, *Lucrezia Borgia*. The abruptness in editing, the peculiar incidents chosen for the portrayal of character (particularly the Pope), the introduction of Savonarola, all have disturbed me mightily until the whole fitted into a pattern of a historical drama intended as symbolic of present conditions. If the Pope be considered as the League of Nations, each character can fit into its symbolic place. Again, the Pope may be considered the constitutional government of Germany, Italy, or Russia, even Japan; Caesar is then the dictator, and the others fall into place. Can it be that any French producers have consciously made a picture with such a subtle theme?

* * *

IF PRODUCERS have peculiar ideas about what the public wants in pictures, how about the producer-distributors' ideas of booking contracts? The Public Relations Department of the Producers and Distributors Association is active and generous in promoting the study of cinema art, the creating of a demand for the family standard at the week-end theatre shows, etc., and then in its booking contracts it inserts no clauses to aid in maintaining the Friday-Saturday standard, but does insert clauses which are used by every exhibitor in the country as an excuse for avoiding the observance of the standard. It seems as though the Producer-Distributors could settle the block-booking blind selling question by changing their contracts. If the "family standard" pictures were secured for the times when the children go in overwhelming numbers (this includes young people), a lot of public interest in the booking problem would die by the wayside, and with it a mass of legislative action.



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BELOW THE WASTE

By Don Quixote

BOTH military and political strategy dictate that when there is trouble at home, stave it off by making trouble abroad. This procedure may account for the policy employed by one of the major studio executives who signed up an even half a hundred players from Vladivostock to Copenhagen and had them shipped to Hollywood like herded cattle. Fearful that his own position was insecure he undertook a continental sojourn, and as evidence of his interest, good faith and sincerity, saddled the home office with \$250,000. worth of acting talent. These players remained in Hollywood for six months, and at the end of that period forty-seven of the fifty had been dropped, without ever appearing before a camera. As a reward for the executive's showmanship shrewdness, he was given a new contract at a substantial salary. Everyone was extremely happy. The studio for whom he did so much. The actors who pulled down \$200 a week or better for doing nothing. The executive himself, who can now bestir himself with the intricate steps of the dance of the faun, a reputed favorite of his. Perhaps the investors did not fare so well.

Fancy Foreign Formula . . .

HOLLYWOOD'S treatment of foreign stars is nothing short of fantastic. Three years ago, Martha Eggerth, a popular continental star, was signed to a contract by Universal Pictures for a reputed salary of \$50,000 per picture. Her arrival was known eight months in advance. When she reached Hollywood, ostensibly ready for work, there was no story for her. Treatment after treatment was hurriedly prepared, but nothing was found suitable for immediate production. Miss Eggerth remained the duration of her option period and departed for Europe. Several days after her departure a shooting script was finished and shelved. Three complete treatments, the work of six writers, gathered dust. At that, however, Universal possessed a valuable literary property. This still remains in the possession of that company, although offers have been made to purchase the story.

The New? Universal . . .

ALL this transpired in the halycon days of the Laemmle regime. It might seem that the Case Eggerth might have established a precedent of what not to do—for Universal at least. But the Charles R. Roger's era has not changed the fancy foreign formula one iota. Universal cast its eye upon comely Danielle Darrieux over a year ago, negotiated and signed a contract for a purported \$30,000 a picture. The producing end of the studio knew of her arrival in the summer of 1937. The actress arrived in November of last year, and everything and everyone at the studio greeted her midst backslapping and huz-

zahs, except the lowly but essential shooting script. The New Universal diddled and scribbled, shelved *London Bridges*, and finally started *Rage of Paris*. This on the 25th of March. In the meantime, because of contractual obligations in France, Miss Darrieux became the defendant in a law suit. But because Universal needed her for the much bruited *Rage*, that company chivalrously paid the fine stipulated in the final judgment award.

Saved By Mayerling . . .

PUBLICIZING a foreign star for the American market, as Anna Sten's discoverer well knows, is an expensive and arduous labor. The wheels of the Universal promotion and publicity machine moved on relentlessly and rapidly, until Darrieux's shapely form adorned every important magazine and newspaper in the country. However, unlike the 440 yard runner, a publicity campaign has no second wind and soon loses momentum. This is what began to happen to the cannon salvoes of promotion that gave the French actress to the American public. The saving grace of *Mayerling* and *Club de Femmes*, both French film productions, saved her from slowly engulfing anonymity. Miss Darrieux is an exception among foreign stars who have come to Hollywood. Instead of remaining the duration of her option, taking the money and returning to her native land, she waited obligingly for the literary mills of the Gods, which grind exceedingly slow, to push out a shooting story. That she did not follow Martha Eggerth's procedure, and that *Club de Femmes* and *Mayerling*, now being shown on the RKO circuit throughout the country, kept her name and presence alive is not to the credit of the one responsible production chief, Charles R. Rogers.

Who Is Dolly Haas? . . .

DOLLY HAAS, the client of one of Hollywood's biggest and most influential agents, Myron Selznick, has been on the payroll of Columbia for over a year without appearing in a single picture. But she is drawing a monthly salary. And the much touted Isa Miranda, a charge of Paramount, is another example. She has been under contract for a year, hailed as a new Garbo, Dietrich, Hepburn and Carroll rolled into one. But any thought of profiting by the investment of publicity, time and salary is out of the question. Isa Miranda is a ghost glamour girl. Her inactivity is a clear reflection of the capacity of the creative brains of the industry. It may be, of course, that the creative intelligence was burned out in choosing them for the Fourth at Santa Anita; but this is little consolation to the people who like to draw dividends on their investments. On reflection I wonder which procedure is more inimical to the best interests of the industry. Those already outlined above, or that in which an actress of Annabella's talents is lost in poor parts, or that in which an actress like Simone Simon is killed off slowly but definitely in an assignment like *Love and Hisses*. I hesitate to select the worst manner.

ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH
WRITER

Agent: George Frank, Inc.

Hollywood

10 CENTS

SPECTATOR

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—April 30, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 3

Pictures As a Business

The Editor Goes Into Figures and Shows
That Greater Costs Did Not Make
Corresponding Increase in Film
Theatre Audiences

Contributor Discusses Racketeering in the
Purchase of Screen Story Material

Bruno David Ussher Analyzes Use of Music
in Andrew Stone's "Stolen Heaven"



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From the EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

FINANCIAL ASPECT OF PICTURES . . .

MAKING motion pictures is a business whose units are owned by stockholders in all parts of the country, a serious business turning out product expensive to make. A starving artist cannot take a roll of film into his garret and make a cinematic gem. A few hundred thousand dollars must be invested before a start can be made with even a simple picture. In the Hollywood district \$200,000,000 has been spent on the plants in which screen entertainment is manufactured. The film industry ranks with the greatest American industries, having a total investment of \$2,000,000,000 in studios, theatres and allied enterprises. A couple of years ago you probably thought the country had all the theatres it needed. In 1937, \$29,500,000 was spent on new theatre construction and 2008 were added by reopening or new construction. In 1936 it cost \$135,000,000 to make 1446 feature-length pictures and shorts; in 1937 it cost \$170,000,000 to make 1311. You will notice it cost \$35,000,000 more to make 136 less films.

Box-Office and the Recession . . .

ANY expenditure is justified if it proves profitable. During the first nine months of 1937 some of the production companies showed a handsome excess in profits over the same period in the previous year. But the last quarter did not hold up so well even though the theatres of the country were showing the fewer pictures which cost more to make. Costing more to make, we surely can assume the additional expense was incurred in making the fewer pictures correspondingly more entertaining. But if they were more entertaining, why the abrupt falling off in box-office receipts when their showing in theatres was at its peak? The recession? History has established as a fact that the amusement business is the last to feel a financial depression. The motion picture was the last to feel the one which started with the explosion in 1929. In 1930 motion picture attendance in the United States reached an all-time weekly high of 110,000,000. Today it is 80,000,000. In 1935, when the depression was functioning to full capacity, it was 80,000,000, climbing that far back from a low of 60,000,000 in 1932-33. During the last seven years of the silent picture ending in 1928, attendance climbed progressively from 40,000,000 to 65,000,000.

Pictures Responsible for Slump . . .

THE stand-still attitude of picture attendance today is ascribed by Hollywood to Mr. Roosevelt's Recession. The fact is, however, that while the picture depression started quite a long time after the general depression got under way—thus proving the rule that the amusement business is the last to feel a general decline in business—the picture depression which cut down receipts in the last quarter of last year, almost beat the Recession in getting away from the post. That rather would indicate that pictures were responsible for their own slump and that general conditions had little to do with it. And do not overlook the fact that in 1937 Hollywood spent \$35,000,000 more on its pictures than it did the year before, made fewer pictures, thereby spending more per picture to make them better, and still in the last quarter of the year did not make as much money as it did in the last quarter of 1936. Now what I am getting at is this: If at the increased expenditure of \$35,000,000 the talking picture cannot hold the audience cheaper pictures assembled—well, where is the film industry going to get off if it continues to make the kind of pictures it is making now?

Not Healthy Progression . . .

TO SUPPLY the present audience with screen entertainment Hollywood is spending more than one hundred million dollars in excess of what it cost to entertain the audience in 1928, and today's audience is only 15,000,000 greater than the 1928 audience. An increase of away over one hundred per cent in cost to increase the market by a little less than twenty-five per cent scarcely can be reckoned as healthy business progression. Certainly the extra \$35,000,000 which the film business spent last year served only to keep intact the audience it previously had established. Spending the extra amount on a smaller number of pictures means that the average cost of pictures greatly exceeded the 1936 average. This suggests some interesting questions. What stupendous sum will Hollywood have to spend to work its way back into the peak talkie attendance which is 30,000,000 above the present figure? And on what kind of pictures can it spend the additional millions? Surely the gigantic, stupendous, colossal peak already has been attained. Can Metro give us anything more exquisite than its *Romeo and Juliet* or more thrilling

than its *San Francisco*? Can Sam Goldwyn give us anything more overwhelming than his *Hurricane* or more joyous than his *Follies*? Earthquake, hurricane and fire already have done their darndest. In *Gold Is Where You Find It*, Warners have turned loose a flood and there is only a volcano left, and no producer yet seems to have discovered what to do with one if he had it.

Becoming Too Colossal . . .

AND is more money per picture the way out? Scarcely. Hollywood producers must stop doing what Jack Warner so aptly describes as "turning out pictures for their own amazement." That is what they have been doing. Each one has been trying to beat the other fellow. Spectacles have bulged from square yards to acres and seem destined to end only with the range of vision. And the cost! Whew! Only a few years ago a million-dollar picture would have been as colossal as an undertaking as its press agent could claim it was as entertainment. But today it seems that production only has started nicely when the first million has been spent. *Conquest*, the most recent Garbo picture, cost a little this side of three million, *Goldwyn Follies* a little the other side of two million. And still you never saw even one million dollars on the screen. You have seen pictures against which one or more millions have been charged, but you have not seen one upon which that much has been spent in creating what you see.

Why Costs Are High . . .

SOMETIMES a dozen scripts are written before one is decided upon for production. The dozen appear on the cost sheet. When stars are waiting for a picture to begin, their salaries while idle are charged to it. When the picture emerges, it leaves on the cutting room floor whole sequences which were shot expensively on the off chance of their being used. But the public pays for them with its dimes and quarters. There is the main weakness of the Hollywood system of handling picture finances. Instead of paying for its own mistakes, it assesses the cost of them against its customers. A picture upon which one million dollars has been spent and another million wasted, is bally-hooed to the world as a two-million-dollar production and charged for accordingly. Can it go on? It cannot.

* * *

WILL ANNOY MARTIN QUIGLEY . . .

WHEN the suggestion is made that Hollywood should produce a picture which would be a plea for universal peace, it is met with the argument that the sole mission of the screen is to entertain, not to indulge in propaganda. The Quigley publications break out in a rash every time peace propaganda is mentioned. The *Spectator*, in urging the making of an anti-war picture, has not challenged the argument that the mission of the screen is to entertain. Its plea has been for a producer to make the peace plea entertaining; but even that is opposed by those who share Martin Quigley's total lack of comprehension of the opportunity the film industry has to make money by

giving the world what it needs so badly—a picture which will reveal the complete futility of war. "It can't be done," says Hollywood, even in view of the fact that it already has been done in the case of Century's *Four Men and a Prayer* reviewed in this *Spectator* (page 6). It is not the anti-war picture, but it is propaganda against the munitions evil. I tremble at the thought of the convulsions there will be in the Quigley offices when it is realized that in spite of Martin's anti-propaganda proclamation, a propaganda picture has been made.

* * *

SOMETHING WILL WOULD APPROVE . . .

PAUL MUNI, appearing in a Warner short reel, will tell audiences in most of our film theatres that in honor of the late Will Rogers institutions to care for under-privileged children will be founded with the money contributions the audiences are invited to make. "And," says Paul, "that is something Will would like." The short is an entertaining little thing which the studio made for free distribution to exhibitors, four hundred prints now being distributed.

* * *

ALEC TEMPLETON, GREAT MUSICIAN . . .

WITH over one hundred pieces of printed music already to his credit, twenty-six-year-old Alec Templeton, now appearing at the Cocoanut Grove where he is accorded the unusual distinction of a night spot audience remaining absolutely silent while he entertains it, is destined to be recognized as one of the really great musicians of the day. His memory is astounding. Seated at the piano, his nimble fingers pour into ears of his listeners his own interpretation of any composition asked for—symphonies, ballads, popular songs of the day, works of his own, come from the instrument as great music. Although he cannot see what appears on the screen, he is a regular attendant at film theatres. In England he has composed scores for pictures. A script is read to him and he proceeds to write the score to match the scenes as he interprets them. He has played with symphony orchestras in Europe and this country, his appearances at popular resorts being limited to the Rainbow Room, New York, and the Grove here. He plans to devote himself to composing. He is a charming young man to meet, a happy, kindly, human person, with keen intelligence and a lively sense of humor. One of his greatest pleasures is playing for his friends. Such a brilliant musician should be kept in Hollywood. The screen is the ideal medium for the exploitation of his genius.

* * *

APPROVES THE SUGGESTION . . .

FROM Charles P. Jervy, Hartford, Connecticut, I received this letter: "Once again, I have occasion to address you and express my appreciation for a fine article on the need for more realistic work for peace and against war. I am referring now to your comments beginning 'Each morning the newspapers demonstrate afresh that, of all His creations, Man is the

one of whom God must be most ashamed.' I only hope that your suggestion that the situation would be a great theme for a motion picture will some day, before it is too late, be accepted by someone with the ability to 'do the job.' I am especially glad, too, that you particularly commented upon the insane preparedness moves which are now being made by our own country. Unquestionably, we are preparing, not *against* war with some unknown country, but definitely *for* war, with Japan. And some of the powers that be will perhaps be sorry if we should not have the opportunity to use these weapons which are being prepared. Please keep up the great work!"

* * *

EASTERNERS AGREE WITH BRUNO . . .

THE note of warning, first sounded in the *Spectator* by Bruno David Ussher, that Deanna Durbin's singing voice should be given a long rest, is being repeated by Eastern picture and radio commentators. Someone should make the journey out to Universal and tell Charlie Rogers the one about the goose and the golden egg.

* * *

DR. FIDLER, CONSULTANT . . .

DURING his recent illness Bill Powell probably spent a lot of money for services of the doctors who attended him. They told him it was safe to go back to work. Jimmie Fidler in a recent broadcast told Bill he should not go back to work. If Jimmie, as an act of friendship, had taken the case at the outset, Bill could have saved all the money and would not now be risking his life by taking the doctors' word for it that he is fit to resume his acting career. Jimmie should branch out. No doubt Einstein would like to be set right on his scientific theories and Henry Ford would be glad to learn how to make motor cars.

* * *

MUSICALS AND MURDER . . .

UNQUESTIONABLY a big factor in the success of a picture is the manner of its projection in the various houses in which it is shown. While staying overnight in a small town we attended its picture house, then showing *Naughty Marietta*. The sound was awful, Nelson Eddy's voice came from the screen as a high, and what musicians would call a "white" tenor, and Jeanette MacDonald scaled heights which Lily Pons never would attempt. The theatre manager explained the small attendance by saying his people did not care for singing pictures, and that, anyway, he did not think Jeanette and Eddy had voices worth listening to. He was right about that; as they sounded in his house they certainly were not worth listening to. It might pay the film industry to make some effort to have sound projection standardized. Gladys Swarthout's voice was recorded for *Romance In the Dark* up to about eighty-five percent of trueness; in small theatres audiences will get about twenty per cent. Musical pictures can not maintain box-office strength in face of such brutal treatment as that.

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

EIGHT A.M. Two hours, with time out for breakfast, of work in the garden already behind me, and now I have to give some thought to my *Spectator* duties. But I am back in the garden, Freddie, the spaniel, curled in the rustic chair beside the one I am seated in, and Bo Peep, the Peke, audibly gnawing at a bone she herself transported from the kitchen; the sun lifting the morning haze; birds in the pepper, locust and mulberry trees singing for the breakfast already spread for them beside the bath which before noon they will empty with their splashings; a distant rooster crows, a dog barks, from far away comes the dwindling purr of a motor car—muted sounds which make the morning silence, the indolent silence of rural life. . . . But now to my *Spectator* job. . . . Last night I saw a pict—. . . Just noticed a gorgeous Sun Kiss rose, the first of that variety this season; and after admiring it, went around to the back of the house and looked again at Mrs. Spectator's sweet peas, the finest I have seen in Southern California. . . . What about the picture I saw last night? I forgot why I mentioned it. . . . Better stick in the garden. . . . Like to know what I have in it? It is a fascinating place; just now composed mostly of beds of smooth, rich earth, each dotted with low green things, lying close to it, sending down into it tiny tendrils through which they suck up life which later will be expressed in all the colors on nature's palette and all the perfumes she creates.

Meanderings Continued . . .

A GARDEN'S promise is its spring allure; its fulfilment, a summer and autumn joy. That long, curved bed, for instance, is not much to look at—just a stretch of brown soil in the shade of pepper trees. When the little things which dot it now achieve the end to which nature guides them, the bed will be a mass of subdued colors, Christmas Cheer begonias in the background, velvety coleus covering the center expanse, Cora Bells, with their rich foliage, red stems and red drooping flowers, forming a border which curves with the graveled path. That is one of the beds, a shaded one, but there are many others, some which sit all day in the sun and will be particularly brilliant when their colors develop; others partly shaded, and one is the surprise bed. Judging by the appearance of the small plants now growing sturdy in it, there are a couple of dozen different varieties which will have to bloom before we know what they are. But these are some of the varieties we know we have: Geums, foxglove, delphinium, zinnias, giant asters, salpiglossis, poppies, verbena, stocks, gladiolus, painted daisies, sweet William pom pom zinnias, phlox, penstemon, cosmos, shasta daisies, hollyhocks, canna, and oodles of roses. As I sit here in the shade of a locust tree which is draping itself in its fragrant blossoms, do you wonder at my failure to remember what I intended to say about the picture I saw last night? Anyway, Freddie has brought me his rubber ball, and that means serious business which must be attended to at once.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

CENTURY PRESENTS A WINNER . . .

● **FOUR MEN AND A PRAYER**; 20th-Fox picture and release; Darryl F. Zanuck in charge of production; directed by John Ford; associate producer, Kenneth Macgowan; screen play by Richard Sherman, Sonya Levien and Walter Ferris; from a book by David Garth; photography, Ernest Palmer; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Rudolph Sternad; set decorations by Thomas Little; film editor, Louis Loeffler; costumes, Royer; musical direction, Louis Silvers. Cast: Loretta Young, Richard Greene, George Sanders, David Niven, C. Aubrey Smith, J. Edward Bromberg, William Henry, John Carradine, Alan Hale, Reginald Denny, Bertin Churchill, Barry Fitzgerald, Claude King, Cecil Cunningham, Frank Dawson, John Sutton, Lina Basquette, Frank Baker, William Stack, Harry Hayden, Will Stanton, Winter Hall, Lionel Pape, Brandon Hurst, John Spacey, C. Montague Shaw.

BEAUTIFULLY done. Thanks to the brilliant direction of John Ford, this heart-warming story of the love of four sons for their father, comes to the screen as one of the not many very fine pictures we have had this season. Superbly mounted and artistically photographed, it has much to offer in a visual way. It always has been a *Spectator* contention that the story is not the determining factor in the success or failure of a motion picture, that the important thing is how the story is told. The story of *Four Men and a Prayer*, stripped to its essentials, is about as lurid and well punctuated with murders as are those of which the horror thrillers are made to take their places on double bills. It would have lent itself admirably to the hiss, scowl and pant method of telling, but it comes from the Century studio as a great, dignified screen offering of vast credit to all those who had a hand in its making. Trust John Ford to plumb the depths of a story's emotional possibilities. Never obvious in his approach, always gentle in his method, he nevertheless with telling force injects sudden heart-throbs which stir the audience and bring responsive tears.

Some Emotional Moments . . .

EARLY in the picture the father and four manly sons face the portrait of their departed wife and mother and quietly drink a toast to her memory. There had been no previous mention of her, no incident which gave her a place in the story, but so ably had Ford developed the atmosphere of the picture, the quiet, simple gesture of the five men made a deeply touching scene. Again in the closing sequence in which we see the four sons backing from the room in which the King of England had bestowed posthumously the Victoria Cross upon their father whose murder they had avenged and whose name they had cleared, we have another of those quiet emotional thrusts which gain cumulative value by the manner in which Ford builds to them. The production and direction combine to make the picture greater than the story, proving my contention that the manner of telling is more important than what is told. I am not belittling the screen play. It is an admirable piece of scenario writing, a deeply human document en-

livened at intervals by flashes of wit and little touches discernably directed and ably acted.

Reveals Munitions Evil . . .

THE story has the advantage of being about something, of having greater significance than would attach to a narrative concerning only one family and affecting only the members of it. The evil wrought by the promiscuous sales of munitions is brought out strongly, a theme given timely application by virtue of civilization's present trend. Munition makers are the villains of the story, which gives the picture international flavor. It also has a wide geographical sweep, beginning in India, touching Washington, jumping to both London and rural England, then to South America, and finally back to London where it ends in Buckingham Palace. The various locales gave Century an opportunity to present an imposing production, an opportunity it availed itself of to the full by giving us one of the most visually attractive settings we have had in years.

Well Cast, Well Acted . . .

THE father in the picture is played by Aubrey Smith, the sons by Richard Greene, George Sanders, David Niven and William Henry. It is ideal casting, each of them giving a perfect performance. Niven reveals a comedy sense only hinted at in previous appearances. Young Greene, whom I understand Century is to develop into a leading man of importance, seems to have everything it will take to make the plan successful. Greene is handsome, has a good voice and is a pleasing actor. A stablemate of Tyrone Power, he will give that young man some strong competition for the favor of the fair sex. Loretta Young is the girl in the picture. As clever as ever, she is handicapped in this picture by some of the gowns she wears. In one scene she wears an inverted jelly mold as a hat and a ruffled potato sack as a gown, an ensemble so fascinating that it occupied my attention to the exclusion of the meaning of the scene. Music plays a prominent part in the satisfaction the picture will give, and credit for that goes to Louis Silver. Louis Loeffler deserves mention for a capable job of film editing.

ANDREW STONE HAS AN IDEA . . .

● **STOLEN HEAVEN**; Paramount picture and release; directed by Andrew L. Stone; screen play by Eve Greene and Frederick Jackson; based on a story by Andrew L. Stone; photographed by William C. Mellor; art direction by Hans Dreier and Franz Bachelin; edited by Doane Harrison; dances staged by Le Roy Prinz; musical direction, Boris Morros; music from Liszt, Grieg, Moszkowski, Johann Strauss, Chopin and Wagner; musical advisor, Phil Boutelje; assistant director, John H. Morse; song by Frank Loesser and Manning Sherwin. Cast: Gene Raymond, Olympe Bradna, Glenda Farrell, Lewis Stone, Porter Hall, Douglas Dumbrille, Joseph Sawyer, Esther Dale, Charles Judels, Ferdinand Gottschalk, Charles Halton, Bert Roach, Rolfe Sedan, Horace Murphy.

EIGHT or nine years ago a young fellow came to me with a screen story and an idea of how it should be presented. He told me his name was Andrew Stone. So impressed was I with the story and

its young author that I spoke to some producers about him and wrote things about him for the *Spectator*. But Andy proved to be ahead of his times. He thought purely in motion picture terms, in terms of the fundamentals of Hollywood's business, and in Hollywood that is not done even yet by those in control of the film industry's destinies. However, in Bill Le Baron Andy finally found someone who could see that the young fellow had something, and *Stolen Heaven* is evidence both of Bill's judgment and the wisdom of it. What I cannot understand about the whole thing is why it took a major studio so long to discover what was so obvious to me eight or nine years ago. But what matters now is that young Stone has been given his opportunity and has availed himself of it in a most satisfactory manner.

Music Is Part of Story . . .

ONCE before Andy made a picture in which music was an integral part of the story. It was *The Girl Said No*, which made generous use of the Gilbert words and the Sullivan music. In *Stolen Heaven* he advances his conception of screen music one step farther towards its ultimate fulfilment—a step already far in advance of that taken by any other director, but only hinting at what we may expect from him. In *Stolen Heaven*, Andy has wedded an ordinary crook drama to the music of Strauss, Liszt, Chopin, Grieg and Moszkowski. That is what, when I first met him, he told me he wanted to do—to make music a story element, to introduce it at intervals to advance the story, not as interpolated numbers of value to the picture only to the extent of their musical worth. For instance, Liszt's *Second Hungarian Rhapsody* has been given a visual setting, whether or not it is what the composer may have imagined when he composed the music, being a matter of no concern. Stone keeps it within the story by having the principal actors in sight throughout the entire presentation of the number. While we listen to the music we see the story being advanced by the people involved in it, thus keeping alive our interest in the plot.

Is a Refreshing Departure . . .

THE most striking example of Stone's union of music and cinema is the treatment of Liszt's *Liebestraum* in the closing sequence. Lewis Stone, playing a once world famous concert pianist, has been deluded into the belief that in his old age he still is great. His return to the concert stage is announced and a large number of admirers assemble for his first concert. The drama of his appearance is woven cleverly into the crook story, suspense being created by speculation as to whether he will display his old time mastery of the piano. Thus we have a great musical number, entertaining on its own account, becoming a dramatic incident in the forward progression of an ordinary crime drama which gets its chief value as screen entertainment from its association with some of the world's greatest music. That surely is a departure, and it comes at a time when the motion picture screen is badly in need of a few new ideas.

How the picture will appeal to the general public is something the box-office will have to demonstrate, but it is one everyone engaged in a creative branch of picture production most certainly should see.

From Motion Picture Standpoint . . .

LEAVING to Dr. Ussher the task of discussing *Stolen Heaven* from the standpoint of the music it contains (page 12), and regarding it purely as a motion picture designed to catch the popular fancy, I find myself at a loss. Certainly I advise you to see it. Olympe Bradna alone makes it worthwhile. She is the girl who played opposite George Raft in *Souls At Sea* and had a small part in some other Hollywood-made picture. Young, beautiful, talented, she seems to have everything which makes for success. The perfect synchronization of her action and Franchia White's voice in several singing numbers, will earn for her a reputation as a vocalist of outstanding merit. Gene Raymond was not the best choice for the leading male role, a part demanding a greater emotional range than he has at his command. Lewis Stone gives a beautiful performance as the old musician. All the other members of the cast prove acceptable, Andrew Stone's direction of the action demonstrating his possession of a dramatic sense to add to his ideas regarding the use of music. Eve Greene and Frederick Jackson had no easy task to perform in writing the screen play to bring in smoothly all the different elements, but they succeeded admirably. To Hans Dreier and his associates in the art department go praise for an unusually attractive production. The dances staged by the capable Le Roy Prinz also are an outstanding feature of the picture.

FRANK TUTTLE DELIVERS . . .

● **DOCTOR RHYTHM**; Paramount release of Emanuel Cohen production; directed by Frank Tuttle; screen play by Jo Swerling and Richard Connell; from the story "The Badge of Policeman O'Roon," by O. Henry; associate producer, Herbert Polesie; sketch "Double Damask Napkin," by Dion Titheradge; musical direction, George Stoll; music and lyrics by John Burke and James V. Monaco; arrangements, John Scott Trotter; dance ensembles, Jack Crosby; photography, Charles Lang; art direction, Wiard Ihnen; wardrobe, Basia Bassett; assistant director, Russell Matthews. Cast: Bing Crosby, Mary Carlisle, Beatrice Lillie, Andy Devine, Rufe Davis, Laura Hope Crews, Fred Keating, John Hamilton, Sterling Holloway, Henry Wadsworth, Franklin Pangborn, Harold Minjir, William Austin, Gino Corrado, Harry Stubbs, Frank Elliott, Charles Moore.

EXCELLENT entertainment. The script gave Frank Tuttle an opportunity to display in his direction the lively sense of humor which makes his pictures outstanding. Good taste is another characteristic of his interpretation of a script, and his long experience as a director in the silent era developed in him a sense of visual values which makes each of his talkies a nearer approach to the true motion picture than most of his contemporaries are attaining. *Doctor Rhythm* was designed only to amuse, and Frank makes it vastly amusing. It trips along gaily from beginning to end, with never a dull moment and

punctuated throughout with just the right number of musical and spectacle interpolations to maintain the high level of the entertainment quality. Nothing is overdone, even Bing Crosby's vocal contributions being more infrequent than we have been taught to expect when we see his name at the head of a picture's cast.

Bing Crosby As An Actor . . .

BING'S singing, of course, is a big feature of *Doctor Rhythm*, but, as is the case with each of his screen appearances, his acting also is a big feature. To me he always has been one of the easiest, smoothest actors on the screen, one with a true sense of comedy values and appreciation of the possibilities of romantic scenes. He is at his best in pictures directed by Frank Tuttle. Just as *Doctor Rhythm* wisely leaves us with the feeling that we could have stood a lot more of Bing's singing, so does it make us feel we could have stood a lot more of Bee Lillie's comedy. This Canadian girl, who reached the American stage via London, is a delight in this Paramount offering. A really brilliant bit of comedy is a scene in which she endeavors to purchase two dozen double damask napkins in a department store, the sketch, written by Dion Titheradge, being one of the highspots of the production. In it Bee is assisted by Franklin Pangborn, Harold Minjir and William Austin, each of whom helps greatly in keeping the fun at a high level.

Cohen's Auspicious Exit . . .

OTHERS who make valuable contributions to the picture are the clever and attractive Mary Carlisle; Andy Devine, Laura Hope Crews, Fred Keating and Frank Elliott. The smaller parts are handled as acceptably. *Doctor Rhythm* is the last picture Emanuel Cohen made for Paramount before his contract with it exploded and he was paid a huge sum to resist the temptation to make any more for the same release. It is an impressive exit from the Paramount reservation, a musical picture not cut from the same pattern that has been used so often by all producers. The screen play by Jo Swerling and Richard Connell is well written, but I think the story would have been improved if it had not opened with a drunken spree. My view is that a funny thing a man does when he

is sober is funnier than a funny thing he does when he is drunk. Drunkenness is not as good box-office as sobriety. The opening scene in *Doctor Rhythm* will offend a lot of people, and I cannot see the wisdom of gratuitously incorporating in a picture anything that will offend even a few people. Of course, it takes more thinking to invent sober fun, but it can be done.

HITS THE BULL'S-EYE . . .

● **WIDE OPEN FACES**; David L. Loew picture for RKO release; stars Joe E. Brown; associate producer, Edward Gross; director, Kurt Neumann; original story by Richard Flourney; screen play by Earle Snell, Clarence Marks and Joe Bigelow, with additional dialogue by Pat C. Flick; photography, Paul C. Vogel; art director, John Ducasse Schulze; film editor, Jack Ogilvie; musical director, Dr. Hugo Reisenfeld, with Jay Chernis as associate; recording director, Tom Carman. Cast: Jane Wyman, Alison Skipworth, Lyda Roberti, Alan Baxter, Lucien Littlefield, Sidney Toler, Berton Churchill, Barbara Pepper, Joseph Downing, Stanley Fields, Horace Murphy, Garry Owen, Dick Rich, Walter Wills, Joe E. Marks.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

JOE E. BROWN does it again. Here is another racy comedy, a pot-pourri of gags held together by a story which, if only a variation on a formula, is given freshness by the zest with which it is told. The whole thing is plainly "sure-fire" stuff, but considering the market for which it was aimed, it must be admitted that the picture hits the bull's-eye. Children will scream and writhe with excitement from its thrills and with hilarity engendered by its humor. Joe's large and constant following of adults will also be mightily entertained. Those who take their cinema seriously have learned long ago what to expect from these comedies, and will not mispend any of their nickels. So I guess everybody will be happy. From a business standpoint one cannot but admire the system to which the production and distribution of Joe E. Brown comedies have been reduced. This is one of the few production enterprises in Hollywood that is a business. It is known beforehand how much is going into a picture and how much is coming out.

One Gag a Gem . . .

SOME of the gags are imaginative; others are old-timers. Almost all of them are well pointed. One is certainly a gem, the funniest I have seen in a picture for ages. During the racy climax, Jane Wyman, anxious to get a "put-put" motorboat started, gives the cord around the wheel at the top of the motor a hefty yank, such a one that the cord sings through the air and snaps Joe on a bent posterior. It's really capitally done. I snicker yet. Comedian Brown is in good acting fettle, playing his scenes with much esprit. Jane Wyman is very capable at the comedy stuff. Alison Skipworth, the late Lyda Roberti, Stanley Fields and a sizable cast of well-known players contribute competently to the goings on. Alan Baxter, evidently having been caught in the maelstrom of type-casting, again appears as a sinister bad man. Director Kurt Neumann, as I have intimated, has given his material vitality and freshness. The traditional chase at the close of the piece is

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adroitly caught by Cameraman Paul C. Vogel, especially the scene in which the boob-hero and the gal, being pursued by a train, pump a hand-car up to the crest of a drawbridge that is drawing.

REALLY A NICE GIRL . . .

● **LUCREZIA BORGIA**; produced by La Compagnie du Cinema de France; directed by Abel Gance. Cast: Edwige Feuerville, Gabriel Gabrio, Aime Clairiond, Roger Karl, Josette Day, Maurice Escande, Dumesnil, Artault, Max Michel.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

A REDEEMED Lucrezia Borgia makes her appearance in the film of that name produced by La Compagnie du Cinema de France, which recently held forth at the Grand Theatre. It seems that the young woman so prevalently associated with poisonings and other unpleasantries by a benighted public, was really quite a nice girl, more sinned against than sinning, her brother Cesare, a ferocious fellow, being responsible for most of Lucrezia's disrepute. She may have indulged in light-of-loves, red-blooded Renaissance maiden that she was, but that was her limit; she was in truth appalled by the murder going on about her, and genuinely grieved at the death of one of the husbands chosen for her by Cesare, having deeply loved the ill-fated spouse. Well, maybe so. I am not sufficiently up on my Borgias to say. But as a student of drama I can point out that the convincing mingling of good and bad elements in a character calls for master craftsmanship, a craftsmanship not evident in the present piece.

Legend Stays in Effect . . .

LUCREZIA, consequently, is not always clearly motivated, treads occasionally the quagmire of ambiguity. The director and writer, of course, were handicapped by having to keep the censors in mind. Be that as it may, the character never quite convinces us. Despite that Edwige Feuerville brings a wide range of emotion and considerable color to her portrayal, most spectators will probably continue to conceive the Borgia lady as a sinister dame. Cesare Borgia, played by Gabriel Gabrio, is more convincing, being a devil personified, though some of his villainy is so deep-dyed that it resembles the kind American audiences accepted two decades ago. Machiavelli and Alexander VI are more subtle, and the recounting of their problems and intrigues adds historical interest to the picture.

Few Would Be Shocked . . .

THE French film, however, is definitely not one that would appeal to the general public. There is nothing "hot" about it, advertising to the contrary notwithstanding. Bare breasts are to be seen in a couple of sequences, but such demonstrations are commonplaces in the *Scandals* and innumerable "art" magazines, and no one but a boob would be naive enough to gulp at the sight of them. Cesare's manner toward his sister in one scene is probably supposed to indicate he has incestuous thoughts, but there are no overt manifestations of them. In photography, continuity and direction the picture is far

below the standard of American films. French theatrical tradition is much in evidence in the playing. The actors, well-schooled, are to be admired for their bodily control and technical accomplishment, and they have moments of power, but much of their playing is too broad and too obviously calculated for screen purposes. Persons with special interests, students of history or of acting, or those who are intrigued by the different flavor of European films, may find it worth their while. There is one really magnificent scene in the picture—the mob is storming the palace, intent on ousting the Borgias, beating its way up a long flight of stairs, when suddenly the gigantic doors at the top open and Alexander VI stands boldly before them in his flowing white robe, incarnating all the tremendous power of the church; they cower and kneel in prayer before him.

BAD ONE FROM BRITAIN . . .

● **WIFE OF GENERAL LING**; produced and distributed by Gaumont-British; producer, John Stafford; directed by Ladislaus Vajda; story by Peter Cheney; screen play by Akos Tolney; editor, R. Thomas; photography by James Wilson. Cast: Griffith Jones, Inkijinoff, Adrienne Renn, Alan Napier, Anthony Eustrel, Jino Soneya, Hugh McDermott, Gibson Howland, Gabrielle Brune, Lotus Fragrance, Marion Spencer, Billy Holland, George Merritt, Howard Douglas.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

JUST when Alexander Korda is re-establishing the once high position of the British film with his four outstanding hits in New York, *Storm In a Teacup*, *Divorce of Lady X*, *Gaiety Girls* and *Return of Scarlet Pimpernel*, all doing holdover business, Gaumont-British spoils the effect with its *Wife of General Ling*. Several years ago, directly after the success of *Henry VIII*, British studios descended on Hollywood en masse and brought back to Albion's shores some of the best native talent in acting, writing, technical and directing lines. For a time the British film was a threat to box-office supremacy, and the day when a spectator would yawn in protest that he was seeing "one of them English pitchers" seemed over. And *Ling* is a throwback to "one of them English pitchers." There is little to commend it. The plot is trite; the direction poor, the acting indifferent.

Case of Griffith Jones . . .

GRIFFITH JONES, a British intelligence officer outwitting a murderous war lord who poses as a Hong Kong (British territory) philanthropist, appeared in *Yank At Oxford*. He was Beaumont,



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sworn enemy of Robert Taylor. For some his performance was as engaging as the international favorite's. Yet in the present picture his acting is nothing short of hammy. On the other hand, under Jack Conway's direction in *Yank* Griffith Jones emerged as a clear-cut character, as a definite personality. In *Ling* when Jones is trapped by the war lord's men he pleads for his life in a manner that stamped him as somewhat of a coward. All in all, young Jones, for all his looks, seemed to be an arrogant sort of pup, intolerable in all events.

Faulty Script . . .

THE fault is with the script, of course. Telling the story of an intelligence officer's efforts to uncover a mass gun-running plot from Hong Kong to a distant war lord, the narrative rambles on, with the usual amount of oriental mystery hokum, sudden deaths and subtle poisonings. The love interest of the story transpires between Jones and the occidental wife of General Ling. As an obvious sop to those who might find misregeneration a little revolting, the wife, erstwhile lover of the secret agent, assures him of her non-defilement, points out that her relations with her husband have been purely platonic. An odd system of mores, no doubt, but evidently a phase of Britain's Far East policy of British supremacy. I mention this glaring instance of bad taste because it is illustrative of the lack of attention given to the shooting script. Mme. Ling's protestation that she married her husband as part of a bargain which stipulated that a virginal *status quo* was to exist seemed weak and not a little silly.

Not Timely . . .

ALTHOUGH events of world significance are going on in the Far East, Gaumont-British dug up this dated one from the shelves of the past. Such an offering might have been timely some five or ten years ago. The saving grace of the present picture, however, is the performance of Anthony Eustrel as See Long, the Chinese patriot whose life is sacrificed that the British intelligence officer may know that Wong, the philanthropist, and Ling the ruthless war lord, are one. In the midst of over-acting, his restraint was refreshing. Gibson Gowland, a favorite of the silent era, gives a good performance as the leader of a gun-running outfit.

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THIS HOLLYWOOD

By Bert Harlen

CAT IN THE BAG ESCAPES . . .

A DISQUIETING bent for mathematics has Frank S. Nugent of the *New York Times*, who brings his gifts of calculation to bear on some statistics recently quoted by Will Hays in his address to the motion picture industry, and draws the conclusion that the film czar has at last let a long-guarded cat out of the bag. The secretive feline, according to the columnist, is the fact that motion picture theatre patronage is far below the figure of some eighty odd millions a week, which the film industry has long boasted of, and which Mr. Hays again quotes in this report. The evidence for Writer Nugent's deduction is contained in the following words of Mr. Hays, which follow upon an assertion that the film industry has far from reached the saturation point in movie attendance: "Ten years ago it was estimated, and probably accurately, that the total motion picture attendance was drawn from approximately 25 per cent of our American population. During the closing months of 1937 an experimental poll indicated that there are still 26,000,000 persons over 12 years of age who do not go more than five times a year, and there are millions more who cannot be considered regular patrons of the movies. In this fact lies the importance of our work in bringing new customers to the motion picture theatre."

Will Someone Explain? . . .

WRITER NUGENT deduces, "...if the total population, as of the 1930 census, was 122,000,000, and if 24,000,000 of those were under 10 years of age, and if another 26,000,000 (over 12) go to the movies only five times a year, and if millions more cannot be considered regular patrons, then it would seem that Hollywood counts 85,000,000 paid admissions each week but has possibly fewer than 40,000,000 patrons." What say, Mr. Hays? What say, Hollywood?

* * *

WHERE ARE THE SQUIRRELS? . . .

FROM Bob, up-and-coming young printer, whose deft fingers glide o'er the keys of the linotype to cast in lead many of the pages perused by *Spectator* readers, comes the information I recently sought in this column anent those great black dots which zoom periodically onto the screen, even in the best of films. I had imagined they were left on the film from the editing process, and had expressed my intention of cornering an editor to find out their function and why they had not been eliminated. But it seems the disfiguring black dots are supposed to be there. According to Bob, who used to work in a projection booth, these dots are placed on the film so that the operator will know when to start the machine that will run off the next reel. In silent-picture days a

certain title in the story would indicate to the operator that he was to start the next machine, but now that there are no more titles, generally speaking, dots are put onto the film.

Sensitive Scene Is Marred . . .

ALL of which is nothing short of asinine. Millions of dollars are spent on pictures, tremendous creative energy goes into them, and then, when a film is ready for the public, some one puts black dots on it. In *Jezebel* one zooms onto the screen at the apex of a finely sensitive scene, and with such telling effect that it could not have been more disruptive if designedly placed by a master dramatist. My mind does not run to mechanics, but I can think of half a dozen potential devices, aural and visual, which would serve to indicate the end of a reel to an operator without marring valuable film. Too bad the squirrels back in the hills are not adventurous enough to come down into Hollywood. They would have choice pickings.

* * *

GIVE US THE BACHS . . .

MABEL KEEFER'S recent suggestion of a motion picture based upon the Bachs is one with a wealth of possibilities. From Veit Bach in the sixteenth century on down to Johann Sebastian Bach and his talented sons in the eighteenth century, they are a colorful lot, and this period of history is certainly glamorous and thought-provoking. During the three centuries from 1550 to 1850, perhaps four hundred Bachs are known, almost all of whom achieved some prominence in the realm of music. The projected film, of course, need deal in detail with only the most outstanding ones, using the rest of the clan, who formed a sort of Bach guild, as a highly significant background. Besides featuring some rarely fine music, the picture could touch upon several subjects which would be of wide public interest, particularly the peculiarities of genius and the factors which apparently conspire to bring it about. There is not an equal instance of hereditary genius on record. The evolution of musical instruments should also be of public interest, being a subject which, to my knowledge, has never been dealt with in motion pictures. And how the sound technicians would relish this phase of the picture! Nor need the film be "high-brow." The most remarkable thing about the current *Beethoven* film is the way it humanizes the music of the great master, stripping it utterly of prejudicing academic associations, and giving the spectator new associations of a human kind. If this picture had been made in America, with box-office names, it could have had widespread public favor.

* * *

CLEVELAND HOLDS A FESTIVAL . . .

HOLLYWOOD, absorbed in the immediate problems of creating, publicizing, and distributing motion pictures, does not sufficiently appreciate the valuable work being done by individuals and groups in other parts of the country for artistic advancement of films and the widening of patronage. These objectives are being furthered by the Motion Picture Festival Week in Cleveland, to be held from May 6 to 13, sponsored by the Cleveland Cinema Club. Many agencies throughout the city, libraries, art museums, high schools, colleges, department stores, newspapers, radio, churches, and theatres, are to cooperate in staging exhibits and displays, in conducting publicity work, giving educational programs, and screening special pictures. The primary purposes of the festival are to focus public attention on motion pictures, stressing the standards which characterize good films and demonstrating the processes by which such pictures are made, thus developing more discriminating mass audiences.

May Become National Event . . .

A SIMILAR festival is being held in Chicago, which takes credit for having originated the idea. The plan has been heartily endorsed by the National Better Films Council, and an endeavor is being made to get other American cities to set aside a week for such a purpose next year, making the festival something of a national movement. Among the persons prominent in the field of visual education who are to be heard at Cleveland, are Doctor Alice Keliher of New York City and Dr. James Bliss of Western Reserve Cinema Laboratory. Hollywood producers are co-operating to the extent of sending original manuscripts, costumes worn in recent pictures, and other items of interest to theatre-goers. According to the cinema club's bulletin, efficiently edited by Miss Bertelle M. Lyttle, the organization was founded in 1917 "to study the art of Motion Pictures and its educational and moral effect, and to promote its best development." Mrs. Frank R. Anderson is chairman of the coming festival week.

Eyes Examined and Glasses Fitted

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MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

NOVEL AS WELL AS NOTABLE...

SERVING old wine from a new bottle has been tried in Hollywood before, but there are always at least two ways of doing it, unconvincingly and convincingly. The latter requires more than a funnel. It takes artistic legerdemain if the precious fluid is not to lose flavor. The music score for Paramount's *Stolen Heaven* demonstrates that it can be done. Producer-Director Andrew Stone—credited also with the original story—was lucky to have had Phil Boutelje as musical advisor, Boris Morros watching over the production from his sanctum as general music director. I know he lent more than his usual interest. He cares greatly for the fact that the title reads "Music by Liszt, Grieg, Moszkowski, Johann Strauss, Chopin and Wagner." It is a novel and notable, record-setting title. A great measure of musical completeness has been attained. Interpretation and recording are of the best. (Illusion was lost occasionally by unconvincing differentiation of sound volume in the piano solo to indicate change of distance.) Franchia White's voice not only ranks with the best, but the voice is dubbed in excellently. (She sings in place of Olympe Bradna. The latter opens her mouth at times wide enough to rival Martha Raye. It is the foremost fault of a non-vocalist trying to appear vocal.) In short, the picture should set a mark, musically and in terms of money. Bursts of preview applause confirm this belief.

It Can't Happen Anywhere . . .

THAT a picture so definitely and progressively musical as *Stolen Heaven* should contain quite obvious lapses from professional usage and likelihood is to be regretted. The fault lies with the story. It is impossible to discuss musical virtues without touching on story detail in the case of a production when action and music are interlinked so much and so closely. No artist of fame would entrust the renewal of his career to strangers, especially not on such light assurances. He would want a number of bookings. He would not be satisfied with staging a "comeback" before an audience of villagers in the garden of his forest home. Worse, he would not announce his choice of unimportant pieces—such as those chosen by him—with the air of an artist who has had a great career. If he had chosen a Liszt, a Tchaikovsky or a Grieg concerto, the whole idea of a professional rehabilitation would have sense. And the pianist of Andrew Stone's story is still in possession of his senses. Either of these concertos would have proven popular, and, which is more vital, would have justified the visual and aural use of an orchestra. I fear that a good many people, of all ages, will smile ironically when orchestra, and audience(!) join the "famous pianist" in Liszt's *Liebestraum*. They learn in high school that such a thing is unthinkable.

Fiction Plus Convention . . .

VERY ridiculous bits of fiction occurred in the French Beethoven film, as I pointed out in the April 2 *Spectator*. I am inclined to argue that there was still enough of the Beethoven as one believes him to have been, to accept this portrayal in a measure. In the case of *Stolen Heaven* the author of the screen story was not handicapped by the fullness or paucity, was not forced by the fitness or unfitness of detail in the life of a historic personage. Hence, it would have been easy to make a charming story professionally convincing, considering that factual history did in no way call for consideration. However, there is so much in the Stone music picture which singles it out as eminently musical that one should not inveigh too heavily against such brief scenes as when peasants are shown driving toward the pianist's house singing the melodies of these popular classics heard from the pianist. Again, chorus effects in themselves are well managed, from a choral and a recording standpoint.

Triple Use of Music . . .

MUSIC for the title is exceptionally good and, while dramatically exuberant, is not blatant. It commences with an improvisation in Wagnerian style and culminates in Wagner's famous "Ring" fanfares. The transition into the gayety of a beer garden, where singers and a little orchestra hold forth, comes easily. Andrew Stone has demonstrated here, as in later episodes, a technic by which music is treated not only integrally, but it serves part of the time as a principal entertainment factor per se, at other times music forms important parallel action, and third, it provides always good and on occasion dramatically significant under scoring. For that reason alone *Stolen Heaven* is a significant production and definitely establishes a dramatically sound method of action, dialogue and music treatment. It may well establish new ways and more interest for musical pictures. No doubt, Editor Beaton is dwelling on this feature of Stone's production style. Suffice therefore to add, that music interest is not only maintained, but heightened as the camera and dialogue microphone switch from the entertainers to some guests, again to a detective speaking to the owner of the restaurant. The asides of the singers, meant only for each other, and subtly covered from the audience in the picture by the continuous music, are cleverly managed.

Songs But Without Words . . .

APART from the quaint and appealing feature song, *The Boys In the Band*, by Frank Loesser and Manning Sherwin, used in the restaurant scene, there is a minimum of singing with words, although Franchia White's captivatingly beautiful and expressive voice is heard quite often, while Lewis Stone, acting the aged pianist in the story really convincing-

ly, plays pieces by Chopin, Grieg, Moszkowski, Liszt. Messrs. Stone, Morros and Boutelje again have shown excellent taste by letting the soprano vocalize in the manner of a wordless obligato. It comes rather naturally, for there is hardly a person who has not started to hum or sing a piece while someone else is playing it. This obligato style does not detract from the original because the listener is not offended by silly lyrics. Stone again employs music in the triple manner I have mentioned, and most effectively. Once or twice Chopin and, more so, the Grieg Nocturne, prove definite background music of emotional suspense, particularly in the setting for string quartet. All in all, notwithstanding unprofessional exaggerations in the music festival scenes, *Stolen Heaven* is rich in charm, of wide appeal and notably significant from a standpoint of music drama. Stone and his musical co-workers have proven that the technic of music drama is not the domain exclusively of gods and superhuman heroes.

* * *

KORNGOLD AND SHAKESPEARE . . .

UNDoubtedly Erich Wolfgang Korngold—to give his full name—would prefer to have his name mentioned second, but this paragraph being the expression of a wish, I must mention the Austrian first. To all accounts he has written a remarkable score for Warner's *Robin Hood*. In another week I shall be able to give my personal impressions. As it is, I know that this Viennese musician possesses a remarkable flair for writing music which expresses the atmosphere of "merrie old England." About ten years ago, he had to compose several scores of incidental music for a season of Shakespeare for the Vienna Volks Theatre, if I remember rightly. I know his *Much Ado About Nothing* suite, and it is as amusing as it is exquisite, and in the very spirit of the play. Korngold is a natural melodist. He has, what I would like to call, a distinct sense of situations. I must confess that the *Anthony Adverse* score disappointed me somewhat in that respect, but the picture had kaleidoscopic drawbacks. While it is always easier to make suggestions than to carry them out, yet I muster enough courage to propose that Warners make a *Merry Wives of Windsor* film and commission Korngold to produce a score based in part on the lovely music contained in Otto Nicolai's comic opera shaped after the Shakespeare play. Korngold will know where to strengthen Nicolai's instrumentation and where to insert music of his own.

* * *

LISZT THE GREAT LOVER . . .

ACCORDING to Louella Parsons, the MGM script department is preparing a story of the life of Franz Liszt. Leopold Stokowski is to impersonate the greatest of lovers among heroes of the piano and of tone poems. Greta Garbo is to play the female lead, of course, but there has been more than one such character in the life of the inflammable Franz. I am quite curious about the role MGM has in mind for Garbo. Between 1835 and 1839 Liszt had a great affair with Countess Marie d'Agoult, who

wrote under the name of Daniel Stern, the result being three blessed events, including the famous Cosima, the wife of Wagner. Liszt's other attachment lasted much longer, in fact almost forty years. He met Carolyn Sayn-Wittgenstein in 1847 while concertizing in Russia. La Carolyn left her immensely wealthy but stupid prince, and moved to Weimar, where she and Liszt enjoyed the hospitality of the art-loving Duke. In the course of time Carolyn waxed imperious, wrote voluminously on history of the church, smoked cigars and put on weight. Liszt took a minor degree of holy orders and became known as the Abbé Liszt. Liszt and Marie d'Agoult lived for a while on the estate of George Sand, the great love of Chopin. The latter died two years after Liszt met Carolyn. So the Liszt film of MGM might continue long beyond the historical space of years considered by Columbia's story writer, Sidney Buchman, for the life of Chopin.

BELOW THE WASTE

By Don Quixote

IT SHOULD be apparent even to the uninitiate, who know nothing of the intricacies of motion picture production, that the selection of stories is not only the first function in the making of films, but perhaps the most important single operation. To explain in barest outline the steps of operation whereby scripts, books, galley proofs are furnished to studio story departments by publishers, agents or the authors themselves, seems unnecessary. Yet in this very department, important as it is to the successful operation of a motion picture studio, waste and lack of foresight predominate. There has never been any thorough examination of this fundamental process in picture making. Rarely is proper consideration given to the method of story selection. In most instances Hollywood and New York offices have a department head and four to six assistants. In addition to these are the so-called "outside readers" who occasionally are given scripts to read at home. The haphazard selection and resultant inability of this vital personnel reflects the waste in this all-important department.

Reading Recession . . .

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER in its recent retrenchmen reportedly discharged some 2000 workers, smaller fry who earned from \$20 to \$75 a week. The saving, of course, was important and no doubt helped in balancing the budget. One of the first places where the axe fell was the reading department where inside and outside readers felt the pinch of Metro's retrenchment. However, book publishers and authors did not oblige Metro and cease publishing and writing books to even up with Metro's manpower slack. The wisdom in Metro's move is dubious. The number of books published before and after the Metro axe remains constant. The need for good vehicles remains constant. The press of reading requirements remains constant. All factors remain

the same except Metro's present ability to cover the ground adequately, and intelligently read the amount of material necessary to discover enough stories for its sixty odd feature production program.

Calibre of Readers . . .

IT IS a notorious fact that many reading departments, even at this date, resemble more a concubinage than a reading force of intelligent and trained people. Those unfortunates whose faces and legs have little to commend them for camera purposes are relegated to the reading departments by promising producers, directors and executives. The reading department is jokingly referred to as the "Girl Friend Department." The implication is, of course, that reading and the selection of proper material requires little brains. Readers receive anywhere from \$25 to \$75 a week, the salary depending upon their physical rather than mental attainments. It seems a little off balance to consider that \$100,000 year producers are satisfied that \$25 a week underlings are sifting and sorting nascent screen material. The very lowness of salary presupposes workers of inferior talents. A man working for \$50 a week reading and selecting material will not be happy in the knowledge that his taste and judgment are the channels through which \$500,000 or \$1,000,000 are presently to flow.

Reader Honesty . . .

UNDER the present set-up every practical reader is an incipient author. It is only natural that he should be envious of the writer whose script he is reading and who will get, if he, the reader, so deems, \$3500 for his story. To the reader such a price represents a whole year's salary or more. Why not, therefore, increase his personal income by writing at home himself? And since ideas—good ideas—are always at a premium, what is there to prevent the reader from rejecting *Love In the Rockies* as unsuitable for motion picture production, but keeping for himself and for his future literary efforts the best in that story?

Outside Readers a Problem . . .

THERE was a time during the heyday of prosperity that outside readers received from Metro as much as six dollars for a single review. A 10% cut brought this down to \$5.40, which price now prevails. Universal pays the all-industry low of three dollars per review. The conclusions to be gleaned from these facts are almost too obvious to mention. An outside reader has to be good to be working. But his goodness depends on his speed as well as his judgment. An outside reader, for all the inside readers may think of him, is human and must live. And a man or woman must earn at least \$25 a week to live decently. This means he must have read from five to eight books in one week in order to earn enough to eat. The mechanics of writing a report necessitates his making from four to seven copies (depending on the company) of three separate items. First, a one-page synopsis of the script. Second, at least ten pages of plot in some detail. Third, a half-page of critical

judgment as to the merits of the work as motion picture material.

Speed and Neatness . . .

RKO goads its readers into preparing long synopses by offering awards. For synopses of fifteen typewritten pages or over the reading fee is increased another few dollars. A late reading department head of Metro, Mrs. Lewton, used to insist, as her secretary would tell outside readers, not so much on context as on neatness. And many a script with erasure marks were slapped back for retyping. Neatness should be a essential part of any synopsis presentation, but not the extreme here mentioned. The outside reader, as mentioned, hurries to complete as many assignments as possible. His work is only intermittent at best. The necessary care each script deserves is not possible in the conveyor-belt spirit that pervades every reading department.

God and the Printed Word . . .

IT IS a notorious fact that reading department heads as well as readers have an unexplicable anathema for typewritten scripts. Without further investigation a script presented in this form is hardly suitable. The printed word, the prejudgment of another editor or publisher, is like the word of God to many reading heads. Typed scripts are relegated to the outsider, for the most part, whereas the printed word is the special province of the more fortunate insider. No doubt readability has much to do with this state of affairs. Nevertheless, the difference in spirit with which the two kinds of presentations are met is an ample indication of the business brains of the people who are hired.

Literary Shakedown . . .

ALL these evidences of blundering stupidity are as nothing compared to the nefarious system which permits reading heads to have more than a literary interest in the scripts presented them. It is well known by agents as well as authors that a number of reading department heads insist on a cut of everything that is sold. What this does to the search for quality scripts, the search for motion picture material, the resultant waste and loss of money as well as good available material, is obvious. Recently, a script that sold for \$60,000 netted the author all of \$14,000. Outstretched palms that reached from New York to Hollywood and back had glue on them. The interchange of department heads, not infrequent, suggests the magic circle in which these executives move. It seems to be a genial fraternity of people who make the rounds, year in and year out, between North Hollywood, Hollywood and Culver City, in the merry, merry maypole that costs the studios millions.

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

SOME day we are going to have a producing organization which will become spectacularly successful by doing all the obvious things present producing organizations are leaving undone.

CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by

RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD
of
MABEL KEEFER

WORLD is too old-fashioned! . . . Jotted that down on my little scratch pad after having it suddenly borne in upon me that such is the case, and now I must examine the idea further. . . . To begin with, nations are doing the same old things they were doing thousands of years ago—warring upon each other, strong nations preying upon the weak—and, by all that's good, they think they are forging ahead. The truth of the matter is, they are standing still while the scenery goes by. . . . The democracies of the world may consider themselves up to date, in that they have discarded the antiquated idea that might makes right. . . . We of the United States of America, though we are a long way from reaching our goal, have less exploitation and more realization of the responsibility of the strong for the weak, which means that, as a nation, we have progressed. But, as individuals—I wonder? There are so many old-fashioned ideas that we cling to, and—the irony of it—think that we are being up to date and sophisticated (that word's here again) in doing so. For instance, what could be more old-fashioned than the drinking parties which are a modern imitation of the revelries of the followers of Bacchus? And we worship idols galore! . . . When Bobbie Burns wrote "O wad some power the giftie gie us, to see oursels as ithers see us!" he could not know that one day there would be a medium by which humanity might view its idiosyncrasies. If he were living today he, perhaps, would ask that we might use that medium—the medium of the screen—to keep us from slipping back into those quaint old-fashioned customs which we think are modern, because we have forgotten the past.

* * *

AFTER reading in Dr. Ussher's review of the music in *The Life and Loves of Beethoven*, that there is a vocal adaptation of the opening portion of the *Moonlight Sonata*, I have a vague feeling of something quite depressing having happened. . . . Words for the *Moonlight Sonata*—the spell of enchantment woven by the music, broken by words. To think that anyone should presume to put his own words to music that has an individual meaning for each listener.

* * *

SOME young men who pride themselves on being hard boiled, and who had no intention of going to see anything so foolish as *Snow White*, finally gave in to curiosity and went to see the picture. They succumbed to its charm unreservedly—and why? Because the picture is made from that good box-office recipe, which includes scenic beauty, wholesomeness, infectious music and infectious humor. Walt Disney

and his associates understand psychological effects and right values.

* * *

QUOTING LeRoy Prinz, dance director in chief for Paramount, the *New York Herald Tribune* says: "He contends that the supergargantuan musicals that have been rolling out of Hollywood will be replaced soon by new musicals of more intimate nature." Glory be!

* * *

IN DAYS of old, before knights were bold, the Caveman reigned supreme. He'd stalk his prey, and with the ladies he'd a way which really does seem quite extreme. If he loved a maiden fair, he'd take her by the hair—maybe hit her with a great big stick—and by all the stars above, with him she'd fall in love without his using any rhetoric. Chorus: In the good old Caveman days, when men had such winning ways, they needed no flowers, no taxis and things; no theatre tickets and no diamond rings. They didn't have to shave each day, or wear a derby hat, and the cane they always carried looked quite like a baseball bat. They didn't have to spend ten bucks their lady friends to feed when they took them for a little evening out—oh, no indeed! In the good old Caveman days, when men had such winning ways, they needed no flowers, no taxis and things; no theatre tickets and no diamond rings. Oh, it must have been just fine, not to have to have a "line", but just use those winning ways, in the good old Caveman days.

* * *

OF HUMAN HEARTS, the M-G-M picture, is of the kind we can welcome heartily. The comments upon its theme are interesting. I learn that it is a splendid picture for Mother's Day because it shows so clearly what mothers will sacrifice for their children and how thankless children are. Also it is clearly intended to show that a conscientious minister is as fine in his ministry to souls as a doctor is to bodies. Again, it is a wonderful lesson to mothers not to sacrifice for their children lest it make them selfish. Or, is it a historic drama, showing life and ideals of a short century ago, and thus offering an explanation of some of the practices of today which are greatly at variance with those of that time? I am sorry that M-G-M and Clarence Brown did not portray a more natural town in which the minister and his family could live. There are only two boys and one girl as children, no school, no people between fifteen and forty, yet it is a frontier town.

* * *

A SMILE such as adagio dancers wear when the orchestra misses its cue.—Weare Holbrook. Isn't that descriptive?

* * *

ONE of the janitors in our office building has a habit of going through the hallways making a soft cooing sound—as if he were saying, "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!"—and it sometimes makes me vaguely uneasy, in that it seems to find an echo in my brain. . . . I wonder?

JOAN BLONDELL

IN

"There's Always a Woman"

A COLUMBIA PICTURE

("There's Always a Woman" is a sure-fire hit. It's
a triumph for Joan Blondell.—*Los Angeles Examiner.*)

MELVYN DOUGLAS

IN

"There's Always a Woman"

A COLUMBIA PICTURE

¶ Melvyn Douglas plays his part with a degree of
skill which makes us agree that no one else
possibly could have been such a perfect mate for
Joan.—*Welford Beaton, Hollywood Spectator.* ¶

Hollywood

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SPECTATOR

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—May 7, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 4

*Meeting Demands of Screen Art One
Way to Reduce Picture Costs*

*Option Clause Aims To Get Players
at Less Than Their Value*

*Bruno Ussher Discusses Korngold's
Great "Robin Hood" Score*

*Mabel Keefer, Harlen and Joseph
Comment on Film Topics*



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From the EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

FANTASTIC EXTRAVAGANCE . . .

ECONOMY is good business and good business is economical. It consists of getting the highest quality at the least cost. Motion picture producers are in the manufacturing business, but are getting their conception of the highest quality only at the greatest possible cost. Fantastic extravagance runs riot. A half dozen men control the talent market, yet a girl who would be rated a tremendous success if she were earning five thousand dollars in the commercial world, is considered a mere beginner if she is drawing ten times that amount in the world of films. There are people who last year were paid over three hundred thousand dollars for acting in pictures. Executive salaries are grotesque. A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer stockholder has appealed to the courts to determine the justice of the payment to a small group of home-office and studio executives in ten years of \$32,540,000 in salaries, commissions and bonuses. If competition for services be the determining factor in governing payments to players and executives, it is competition which Hollywood and the film industry controls. The packing industry is not trying to lure players away from Hollywood nor is the steel industry endeavoring to find executives in the ranks of those serving film companies. The film industry has entirely within its own control the salaries, bonuses and commissions it pays.

Should Establish Trademark . . .

A SOAP company can operate economically because its trademark sells its product. It spends money to advertise the trademark and the trademark draws no salary. A picture company operates expensively because it relies on names of players to sell its product, because a star is its trademark, and that kind of trademark does draw a salary. The film industry sells names, not films. You are not asked to patronize a picture because it is good, but because its star is Shirley Temple, Gary Cooper, Bing Crosby, Ronald Colman, Sonja Henie or some other player whose popularity has been earned by performance or built by publicity. Each company has its trademark, but it has no market value. Perhaps I should except Samuel Goldwyn. Sam is unique. He is his own trademark. He may have one of the conventional sort; I am not quite sure of it, for the glamour with which he has surrounded his name blinds my eyes to

any other distinguishing mark one of his pictures may bear. Gradually Sam's name is becoming to mean something at the box-office; eventually it will mean enough to fill theatres, and when that time comes, when all of us patronize a picture because Sam made it and not because Dottie Tootwhistle appears in it, Sam can tell the ten thousand-a-week Dottie to go chase herself, head his next cast with the few-hundred-a-week Mary Jones, make his pictures much more cheaply, charge us less to see them, and still continue to make himself more outrageously rich than he is already.

Art Is Entertaining Factor . . .

AND that brings us to the milk in one of the cinematic cocoanuts, for not until pictures are made more cheaply and sold as pictures and not as star containers, will their cost be less and the satisfaction they give be more. And, peculiarly enough, to make pictures cost less and entertain more, Hollywood need not think of either cost or entertainment, but only of the art of the screen. For it is the art of the screen which entertains, not the story it tells, not the people who appear in a picture. Most of the stories could be told over teacups in a brief ten minutes without creating a particularly lively interest. And yet the average screen drama is, in essence, merely gossip about what is happening to people like your neighbors. One Sunday afternoon George Temple, Shirley's father, and I were occupying chairs under one of the Temple trees, discussing some topic of the day. Shirley came hop-skippping across the grounds and asked her father to lend her ten cents, explaining she wanted to buy a toy from one of the group of young guests who were playing with her. With mock seriousness George discussed with this great screen star the terms of the loan, finally yielding to her gayfully insistent demands, and we picked up our discussion where we had left off.

Screen Glamor Made It . . .

NOT until I saw Shirley's next picture did I think again of the pretty scene on the lawn. In the picture she had one very much like it with Henry Stephenson. She carried it so well that in my review of the picture I commented on it. The preview audience applauded it; I joined in the applause, yet on the lawn the same scene was merely that of a child teas-

ing her father for a dime and affecting us only as an interruption to our conversation. It was the glamour which the screen spreads over everything it does that made the scene in the picture stand out; it was the art of the screen which entertained us. And the screen has no ill which the art cannot cure. The ills from which Hollywood now is suffering are due to its thinking in terms of money instead of in terms of its art.

* * *

STAR'S SPAN OF POPULARITY . . .

ONE of Hollywood's choicest hallucinations is that the life of a star's popularity is necessarily short. As an income tax argument it may be all right, and I hope it proves effective when advanced, but in reality it is luck, not age, which determines the duration of a star's career. A player and stardom can go on until death do them part if the producer for whom he is working knows the business of picture making. It is the mission of a producer to give stars roles which will preserve their popularity, which will make the public continue to like them, and, that done, the child of today can progress to grandmother roles in the future without any falling off in the number of her admirers. Audiences will grow up with her. Children who love Shirley Temple as a child, when they become grandparents, will love her as a grandparent, provided her producers guard intelligently the quality in her which makes her lovable.

* * *

PLAYERS AND THE OPTION CLAUSE . . .

MOTION picture players, Edwin Schallert tells us in *Los Angeles Times*, are favoring contracts for terms of years and without the option clauses which permit producers to terminate them at specified periods, but deny the same right to the players. The option contract always has been a vicious one. Producers seek to justify it with the argument that they are responsible for the degree of popularity a player develops and therefore are entitled to the greater box-office returns for which he is responsible, an argument which does not alter the fact that the option clause is nothing but a device to obtain the services of a player at less than his market value. If such were not the case, the clause would have no meaning. As I wrote recently, producers ruin more careers than they make, but the option clause enables them to escape being the victims of their own folly—permits them, by not taking up an option, to make the player the sole loser. Seems to me that here is something to which the guilds should pay some attention.

* * *

AS EDUCATOR SEES IT . . .

APPLAUSE like this is what heartens an editor. In course of a letter I have received from Harold M. Turney, chairman of the Department of Drama, Los Angeles Junior College, there is this paragraph: "Congratulations again on the very excellent work you are doing in your magazine. It comes to me weekly as a new joy and an inspiration to further

my activities, holding you up as an ideal toward which I should strive. Your boundless energy, your limitless enthusiasm, and amazing critical knack of hitting the nail on the head ten times out of ten times are a constant surprise to me."

* * *

NOT HIGHEST, BUT LOWEST . . .

WILL HAYS boasts that one thing to the credit of the film industry is the "maintenance of the highest possible advertising standard." Before *Test Pilot* was previewed, before anyone could know how good it would turn out to be, Metro's New York exploitation department prepared an advertisement which quoted Leo as saying, "The greatest picture I have ever made is *Test Pilot*. Clark Gable better than in *San Francisco*, Myrna Loy better than in *After the Thin Man*, Spencer Tracy better than in *Captains Courageous*." By maintaining the lowest possible advertising standards, the exploitation departments of the big producing organizations waste a greater percentage of the money they spend than any other department of the absurdly extravagant industry. No one believes picture advertising, therefore there are no returns on the vast sum it costs each year.

* * *

VISUAL ENTERTAINMENT PREFERRED . . .

THE screen is the world's greatest entertainment medium. In this country alone in 1937 there were added to the number of existing film theatres, over ten times the total number of theatres in which the spoken drama is being presented. Long before the talking motion picture made its advent, decimation in the ranks of legitimate theatres had begun, thereby demonstrating that the public preferred to get its dramatic entertainment through its eyes rather than through its ears. Seeing is the least involved thing we do, the only thing which involves neither physical nor mental action on our part. As a nation we are rated as great sport lovers, a reputation we have earned, not perhaps as much by virtue of our love of sport as such as because of our liking for entertainment we can sit and see without thinking, a form we can respond to with our emotions without any help from our intellects. That is the kind of entertainment the silent picture provided.

Enter a Meek Little Man . . .

LET us assume the screen had started off with the kind of pictures we are getting now, the rattley-bang kind which makes a hobby of gathering noises to hurl at us, which shouts dialogue at us, which makes us sit tense to catch every word spoken in the comparatively few pictures in which lines are read in conversational tones; in which airplanes, railroad trains, machine shops, gangster battles are registered as much by the noise they make as by what our eyes behold. Let us assume that some meek little man—I prefer a meek little person for our Great Deliverer—has wandered for years from one noisy picture house to another, always in search of the Perfect Picture. He encounters one with a machine-shop sequence in it, the noise of the machines being so ter-

rific it is almost impossible for him to hear the lines the players are bawling at one another above the mechanical din. Instead of sleeping that night, our little man just thinks, and next morning he gathers together all the motion picture producers and goes into conference with them.

What Camera Can Do . . .

THE motion picture camera, he explains in simple language so as to be understood, is the only thing on earth which can conduct us through an operating machine shop, show us every wheel turning and every belt traveling, saws whirling and hammers pounding, without bringing to our ears, and through them to our nerves, even as much sound as perhaps scientists claim a feather makes when it falls. Why, our meek little fellow inquires, cannot the camera be used to perform this miracle? We know we are in a machine shop as soon as we see it; we know machines make noises and we know we do not like the kind of noises they make, so why make us buy them when we seek relaxation in the evening to rest nerves which have been tired by the unescapable noises of the day? And while they are at it, he asks the producers, why not cut out all the other mechanically reproduced sounds and let us assume a whistle is a whistle even if we do not hear it toot? Our little man completes the list of things screen entertainment could do without, and there is a great awakening on the part of the people who make our pictures.

What Discovery Would Mean . . .

THE discovery is made that motion pictures can give their patrons a great deal to look at and very little to listen to; that recording only the essential speeches and using the camera to make it reasonable we do not hear those which add nothing to a scene, lead to the simplification of the producing process with a corresponding reduction in production costs. The lack of clamor makes the pictures better entertainment, they attract greater audiences, the art itself steps to the front as the principal entertainment factor, there is less reliance on star names, salaries go down, admission prices drop, the film industry is prosperous and everybody is exceedingly happy about the whole thing. Does all this appeal to you as unreasonable reasoning? If you had been used only to noisy pictures, would you not extend a warm greeting to almost silent ones, ones which made you listen only to the dialogue you had to hear to get the sense of scenes?

* * *

STRENGTH OF FAMILY PICTURES . . .

ANOTHER studio announces the production of a series of pictures dealing with the experiences of one family. In that funny way it has, Hollywood no doubt believes the public suddenly has taken a fancy to screen entertainment of that sort. The truth is, however, that people have been interested in families ever since there have been families with which they became intimate. The strength of such series as screen entertainment lies in the opportunities they give us to become acquainted with the members of the

families. When we learn to know them and like them, we become interested in even the trivial things they do. Every producing organization should feature at least one series of the sort, each picture, of course, to be complete in itself.

* * *

IF ONE WOULD DO IT . . .

PROBABLY of all the follies the film industry commits, no other is as foolish as its failure to give musical interpretation of the mechanical sounds which now assail our ears in every picture theatre we attend. If even one producer had intelligence enough to give us a picture in which we heard only conversationally spoken dialogue and music to suggest all the mechanical sounds—motors, sirens, machinery, traffic—he would turn out to be the Moses who would lead the entire industry back to prosperity and keep it there without any more financial problems to worry it.

* * *

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

FREDDIE, the spaniel, and Sophie, the duck, have become bosom pals; when Bo Peep, the Peke, tries to make it athreesome, Sophie pecks her. . . . High on the list of things I could do without is the gargling of tobacco auctioneers on Lucky Strike radio broadcasts. . . . In Paris I ran across two friends from my old home town in Canada; they urged me to cancel my reservation for the return voyage and sail with them a week later; only reason I did not do it was the bother involved, as I had made my reservation in London; I sailed on the Mauretania; they sailed a week later on the Titanic; they went down with the ship. . . . Among *Spectator* subscribers is the War Department, Washington; perhaps with the United States Army back of us we can get somewhere in our war on loud dialogue. . . . I find this among my notes: "Meand.—fishing trip." Can't recall why I wrote it; may have had in mind the time Perry Wood asked me if I would like to go out and get a whale; thought it some sort of joke and said I'd like it; he routed me out of bed at four next morning; we went to San Pedro, joined a party on a boat and that evening returned with a whale lashed to the ship's side. . . . In a flower bed this morning I found a feather standing up straight, quill in the soil; Mrs. Spectator denies she is trying to grow a hen. . . . The other day decided to put rock borders around flower beds; cruised around the Valley but could find no rocks; came to a place where the flood tore through a highway and tossed pieces of the concrete sidewalk hither and yon; brought home slabs of it, broke them up, and, as I look at the garden now I forgive the flood for scaring me stiff. . . . Over the week end Bo Peep and Freddie entertained their cousin, Queenie, an affable German shepherd belonging to one of our daughters; Freddie's attention to her seemed to put Sophie's bill out of joint; she pecked the guest, much to the latter's astonishment. . . . I love the feel of the clean earth as my hands tuck it in around the new plants, but later I have a devil of a time getting it out from under my fingernails.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

MAGNIFICENT ACHIEVEMENT...

● **THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD**; Warners; executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Henry Blanke; directors, Michael Curtiz, William Keighley; screen play, Norman Reilly Raine, Seton I. Miller; music, Erich Wolfgang Korngold; music director, Leo F. Forbstein; arranger, Hugo Friedhofer; photographers, Tony Gaudio, Sol Polito; art director, Carl Jules Weyl; costumes, Milo Anderson; film editor, Ralph Dawson; assistant directors, Jack Sullivan, Leeman Katz. Cast: Errol Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, Basil Rathbone, Claude Rains, Patric Knowles, Eugene Pallette, Alan Hale, Melville Cooper, Ian Hunter, Una O'Connor, Herbert Mundin, Montagu Love, Leonard Willey, Robert Noble, Kenneth Hunter, Robert Warwick, Colin Kenny, Lester Matthews, Harry Cording, Howard Hill, Ivan Simpson.

ANOTHER Warner success. Produced on an elaborate scale, ably directed. Cast with full appreciation of the comedy and dramatic possibilities of the different parts, this version of the legendary Robin Hood's exploits in and about Sherwood Forest will take its place among the finest things of the sort the screen has done. It is entertainment plus. While I still maintain that color photography does not add enough box-office value to a picture to justify its great cost, I must repeat what I have said about it before—that it is capable of bringing some beautiful effects to the screen. There are a score of shots of surpassing beauty in the picture, attractive compositions superbly photographed. The period of the story permitted Milo Anderson to let himself go in the matter of designing the costumes which add so greatly to the historical values of the production. His contribution to the picture is a notable one. Wisely selected outdoor locations, imposing studio sets and the colorful array of costumes made it possible for skilled cameramen to bring to the screen one of the greatest visual treats in its history.

Legend's Liberal Latitude...

HAMPERED by nothing more exacting than legend and dealing with a central character who never existed, Norman Reilly Raine, who had as his collaborator Seton I. Miller, let himself go in crowding stirring incidents into his script. The story is fit companion to its time and the Robin Hood tradition. Only a knight as great as legend has made him, could encounter in such quick succession so many hair-raising adventures and come so safely through them. Good writing, intelligent direction and able acting, all recorded against an alluring background, combine to put the audience mind in a mood for anything, to see possibilities in the impossible, to let itself go, to enter into the fun of the thing and thus thoroughly enjoy itself. This Warner production is a great screen moment, a credit to pictures as a whole, another notable demonstration of the vast possibilities of the motion picture as a medium of entertainment.

Thrill Piled on Thrill...

THE adroit manner in which Reilly and his collaborator get Robin Hood (Errol Flynn) into impossible situations and bring him out unscathed, is

what makes the story engrossing to the point of spine-tingling. Every situation is wrung dry of its opportunity to build suspense, every emotion of the audience is appealed to; thrill is piled on thrill and there is action galore. And through it all runs like a golden thread a beautiful romance, a tender, sweet love affair which blossoms bravely along the path which the succession of deeds of daring takes. The beautiful and gracious Olivia de Havilland is the Maid Marian who loves the heroic Robin Hood. Never before has she given such a performance. With but few lines to speak and only one sustained speech, she nevertheless looms as a big figure among the many hundreds who crowd the screen. Never before have eyes played such a big part in a characterization. Olivia's tell her story more vividly than words and physical action could, and reveal an active mind at work. The romance is directed superbly. In one scene Olivia and Flynn converse in tones scarcely above a whisper, dialogue direction for which the *Spectator* has pleaded ever since the screen was given a tongue, but which so few directors give us.

Direction Is Notable...

THE cast is so long and the performances so uniformly excellent that to give individual mention to all who deserve it would involve praise carried to the point of repetitious monotony, and to mention a few would be unfair to the many. To the two directors, Michael Curtiz and William Keighley, goes joint credit for a magnificent achievement. From what I know of the work of the two, and with no specific information to guide me, I imagine that to Curtiz fell the task of directing the physically stirring scenes, the dashing exploits of horsemen and men at arms, the great mass shots in which the picture abounds; and to Keighley the more intimate scenes, the romance, the shots with restricted camera range. In any event, no picture ever has been given better direction. And certainly no picture ever has been given a more notable musical score, the evaluation of which I leave to the more capable Dr. Bruno David Ussher (page 11).

ONE OF THE CLEVEREST...

● **VIVACIOUS LADY**; RKO release of Pandro S. Berman production; produced and directed by George Stevens; screen play by P. J. Wolfson and Ernest Pagano; original story by I. A. R. Wylie; photographed by Robert de Grasse; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate art director, Carroll Clark; musical score by Roy Webb; orchestral arrangements by Russell Bennett; songs by George Jessel, Jack Meskill and Ted Shapiro; vocal arrangement by Roger Edens; costumes, Irene and Bernard Newman; edited by Henry Berman; assistant director, Argyle Nelson. Cast: Ginger Rogers, James Stewart, James Ellison, Beulah Bondi, Charles Coburn, Frances Mercer, Phyllis Kennedy, Franklin Pangborn, Grady Sutton, Jack Carson, Alec Craig, Willie Best.

BRILLIANT comedy. It moves Producer-Director George Stevens up to the front rank. Some of the sequences in *Vivacious Lady* are among the most expertly directed I ever saw in a picture. Stevens has a delicious sense of humor and thorough knowledge of how to reveal it on the screen. He builds securely to

a comedy point, flashes it at you with the suddenness of a rapier thrust, and then goes on with the story with the added impetus the comedy thrusts give it. There are no detours in his story-telling; his method is a direct one, carrying the narrative along at a brisk gait and picking up the laughs in its stride. Stevens knows what the camera is for, and makes it his chief medium of expression. In perhaps a score of scenes which, as written, make no allowance for spacing for laughs, the dialogue continues through unrestrained laughter without giving the audience the impression it is losing anything. Stevens manages this by skilful direction and intelligent response to it by his players. The writers, too, deserve praise here, for they have written a script in which the dialogue is seemingly the most unimportant element.

Intelligent Writing, Direction . . .

ONE of the tenderest, sweetest love scenes any picture has given us is composed verbally of inane, detached utterances about anything except what the parties to it have in their minds, thus permitting the audience to get its significance visually, not aurally. It is an amusing scene, for all its romantic tenderness, and the audience enjoys its laughter because it knows the words it misses have no particular meaning. Only brilliant direction and intelligent writing can produce such satisfactory and wholly cinematic results. If the scene had depended upon speeches for its development, it would have been just another standard talkie scene which the audience would have to hear to understand. Throughout the picture the same degree of intelligence is displayed in both script and direction, except in a sequence in which the story is carried in dialogue while the players are on the dance floor at a college social gathering. Here no screen intelligence is displayed in either direction or writing. The plea will be advanced that the sequence is given action by the fact that the speakers are moving on the dance floor. It is faulty reasoning. The fact that the characters are airing their private affairs in the hearing of other dancers, serves as a deterring factor in the forward progress of the story by diverting the attention of the audience from the filmic action, the life blood of a picture, to physical action, which, in the case of a dance scene, is solely a visual trimming without story significance. But it always is done, and perhaps its appearance here is a gesture of Steven's reverence for a screen tradition and modest refusal to land on the top of the directorial heap at one jump.

Ginger and Two Jimmies . . .

AFTER all Hollywood sees *Vivacious Lady*, Stevens will be among the directors for whom players will be anxious to work. In Ginger Rogers and James Stewart he had, to start with, two accomplished artists to head his cast, but to his credit it can be said that never before has either given such a brilliant performance. The two marry in the first reel and the story deals with their efforts to win the approval of Stewart's austere father, played effectively by the veteran Charles Coburn. Ginger makes her part seem to have been tailored to her exclusive measure, making

you feel as you watch her that no one else in pictures could have done as well. Jimmy Stewart continues to bear out the prediction I made in my review of his first picture. I wrote that he was destined to become a great screen actor. In *Vivacious Lady* he takes another tremendous forward step. He does not act, and that is what makes him the ideal screen actor. His eyes are the windows through which we see what he works with. He thinks his part and then lets it play itself—at least that is the impression I get when I watch him. It will not be long now until he climbs to a place near the top of the list of box-office favorites. Jimmy Ellison is another of my favorite young men to appear in the Stevens picture. He plays a sophisticated role with distinction, his good looks and pleasing personality being backed by an easy acting manner all audiences will like. Other members of the cast develop to the full all the possibilities of their roles, among them Beulah Bondi, Frances Mercer, Phyllis Kennedy, Franklin Pangborn, Grady Sutton, Willie Best.

Good Taste Throughout . . .

RKO has given *Vivacious Lady* a complete and visually attractive production, the art direction of Van Nest Polglase and Carroll Clark being excellent. I am not aware what it signifies, but after all these years of picture reviewing I find myself becoming gown-conscious. I was aware of the attractive clothes worn by Ginger Rogers, Frances Mercer and others, and see by the credits that they were designed by Bernard Newman and Irene. Music plays an important part in the production, a subject which belongs in Dr. Ussher's department. A feature of the entire offering is the good taste it displays throughout. It glides along briskly—the film editing of Henry Ber- man being a factor in that—and in many spots is hilariously funny to the point of bringing screams of laughter from the audience, but in not one foot of film is there anything to jar the sensibilities of the most relentless stickler for good form. *Vivacious*

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COMEDY BROTHERS AT THEIR BEST . . .

● **KENTUCKY MOONSHINE**; 20th-Fox picture and release; a Darryl Zanuck production; associate producer, Kenneth Macgowan; stars the Ritz Brothers; directed by David Butler; screen play by Art Arthu and M. M. Musselman; based on original story by Musselman and Jack Lait, Jr.; additional dialogue and comedy songs by Sid Kuller and Ray Golden; music and lyrics, "Moonshine Over Kentucky," "Reuben, Reuben, I've Been Swinging," and "Sing a Song of Harvest," by Lew Pollack and Sidney Mitchell; photography by Robert Planck; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Lewis Creber; film editor, Irene Morra; costumes by Royer; musical direction, Louis Silvers. Supporting players: Tony Martin, Marjorie Weaver, Slim Summerville, John Carradine, Wally Vernon, Berton Churchill, Eddie Collins, Cecil Cunningham, Paul Stanton, Mary Treen, Francis Ford, Brian Sisters, Charles Hummel Wilson, Claude Allister, Frank McGlynn, Jr., Jan Duggan, Si Jenks, Joe Twerp, Irving Bacon, Olin Howland, John Heistand, Carroll Nye, Tom Hanlon.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

THE Ritz Brothers hit their stride as screen comedians in *Kentucky Moonshine*. Their travesty on *Snow White* in the finale is bang-up buffoonery, and their impersonations of Kentucky mountaineers throughout most of the picture are cleverly performed and witty in concept. Mimicry is plainly their forte. Though the brethren's comedy has always been characterized by great agility and imagination, yet too frequently in the past it has stood out in a picture like a sore thumb because it had no purpose with relation to the story. Even clowns are characters of a sort, and characters must possess understandable motivation, a certain logic behind their behavior, if they are to win any measure of interest from an audience. Crazy for crazy's sake, impulsive and unpredictable, does not give an audience much to hold onto, so to speak. Spectators may laugh from sheer surprise and yet feel a vague displeasure or even annoyance at the incongruities and irrelevances of the comedians. I refer, of course, to comedians appearing in film stories which are told essentially in realistic terms. In vaudeville sketches comedians are abstractions rather than representations of particular entities, and therefore mere lunacy is sometimes very funny in this medium.

We Laugh This Time . . .

MIMICRY and impersonation, however, lend needed motivation to the work of the Ritz boys, and it is to be hoped that they incorporate much of it in their future performances. In the current picture their work is improved in another way—for the first time, or so it seemed to me, the comedians "got into the camera"; a warmth from within their personalities, something apart from any physical maneuvers, came out of the screen. At any rate, I was immensely tickled by many of their antics in this picture, and, frankly, I had cracked few smiles over their performances in earlier ones. Their work was bettered, too, by having smarter material in this piece, particularly

their sketches at the finale. Director David Butler's eye for comedy values and his skilled temping of the piece are also to their advantage. The story, incidentally, has to do with three young men and a girl, radio entertainers, who, unable to secure a break in New York, travel to the mountains of Kentucky, pose as hill billies, are immediately picked up by a scout and brought back to New York. Good fun takes place in the mountains, what with the "feudin'" of the natives.

Opera and Jazz United . . .

TONY MARTIN scores heavily with his singing. One of his numbers consists of operatic excerpts, with the orchestra working a "swing" motif into the accompaniment. Maybe Bruno Ussher will take issue with the latter feature, but I thought Martin's contribution pretty elegant, revealing a full, colorful tone, a wide and true range, and a great deal of fervor. His acting, however, could stand some polishing. Though his personality is naturally pleasing, he does not make the best use of it; he fumbles his points, fails to get deep enough into his scenes, and does clumsy and unsure things with his hands. Why doesn't Twentieth Century give him the benefit of some straight acting parts? Marjorie Weaver has an engaging warmth in her work, though the present role is not taxing. Her voice, I fear, was scarcely equal to sustaining an entire vocal number in the middle of the picture, in which she is supported by a chorus of girls. Three consecutive musical numbers are too many for this spot, anyway, and the show drops noticeably at this point.

Orchestration Is Tops . . .

ALARGE cast lend their talents to the loony proceedings, notably Slim Summerville, John Carradine and Wally Vernon. The music by Lew Pollack and Sidney Mitchell fills the bill satisfactorily. *Moonshine Over Kentucky* is perhaps the most pleasing tune. I have never thought specialty numbers, generally speaking, were very well adapted to the screen. People go to picture houses primarily, not to hear funny words, but to see things. The musical portions of the picture are greatly enhanced, however, by the orchestrations and renditions, which are full, swingy and flashy.

HAD TOO MANY COOKS . . .

● **SINNERS IN PARADISE**; Universal; associate producer, Ken Goldsmith; director, James Whale; story, Harold Buckley; screenplay: Lester Cole, Harold Buckley, Louis Stevens; photographer, George Robinson; music director, Charles Previn; film editor, Maurice Wright. The players: Madge Evans, John Boles, Bruce Cabot, Marion Martin, Gene Lockhart, Charlotte Wynters, Nana Bryant, Milburn Stone, Donald Barry, Morgan Conway, Willie Fung.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

DULL and pointless. Somewhere in the original story there may have been sound material for a photoplay, but what has reached the screen is a hodgepodge of divergent viewpoints and objectives. Evidently there were too many cooks, and the ones who did the most to spoil the broth were probably among

the three screen play writers. The yarn concerns the activities of an oddly-assorted group of passengers on a giant airliner bound for China, which is wrecked in a storm at sea, leaving the group stranded on a remote island. There is already a man on the island, a fugitive from justice, who has a boat but refuses to take the party back to civilization; finally he changes his mind, having fallen in love with a fair lass of the group. There are a few minor bickerings and an irrelevant fight, but nothing much really happens to anyone and there is no climax in the action. The script covers so much territory, dividing its attention among so many persons, that we develop interest in none of them and have little concern with what happens to them.

Emphasis Is Lacking . . .

THERE are a few touches of irony in the inverted positions in which certain ones of the group find themselves in the new social order, especially a pompous senator and a wealthy heiress, who, by vote of the majority, are put to work at menial tasks, presumably unfitted for anything else. Occasionally flashes of this sort lead one to believe that the story was once supposed to be a study of character, which might have constituted an interesting theme. At the finish most of the characters assure us they have undergone a metamorphosis, but we have to take their word for it; we were not let in on the process. Perhaps some of their regenerating was left on the cutting room floor. A measure of humanness and conviction might have been added to the film by greater finesse in direction, but this is the least imaginative of any of James Whale's work. His constant heavy-handedness is hard to reconcile with his past experience.

Cast Is At A Loss . . .

MEMBERS of the cast seem to have been placed at as great a loss as was the preview audience by the story's utter lack of emphasis. John Boles' characterization is monotonous and wanting in definiteness. The attractive Madge Evans tries hard to make something of a negative part, but her task proves insuperable. Marion Martin, as a gal with a past as well as a Mae West complex, "turns on the heat" capably and contributes some vitality to the picture. She mimics cleverly, too. Gene Lockhart brings vigor to his role of the bombastic and stupid senator, but the role was ill-conceived, and his work suffers from his being required to shout so much. Milburn Stone is seen to advantage as far as his performance is concerned; too

bad his part could not have had more relationship to the story. Willie Fung, as a Chinese servant, turns in one of the most convincing portrayals, his death scene being really impressive. These Orientals die awfully well. I can recall the passing on of two or three others.

MOMENTUM IS EXTRAORDINARY . . .

● **STORM IN A TEACUP**; a Victor Saville production; directed by Victor Saville and Ian Dalrymple; from the play by Bruno Frank; Anglo-Scottish version by James Bridie; a London Film released through United Artists. Cast: Vivian Leigh, Rex Harrison, Ursula Jeans, Cecil Parker, Sara Allgood, Gus McNaughton, Edgar Bruce, Robert Hale, Quinton MacPherson, Arthur Wontner, Eliot Makeham, George Pughe, Arthur Seaton, Cecil Mannering, Ivor Barnard, Cyril Smith, W. G. Fay, Scruffy.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

DISTINGUISHED for its vitality. Most of the world's greatest dramas have been based on conflict, and this play is based upon one of the greatest of all conflicts—the struggle of the lower stratum of society against tyranny and injustice. Not that the film is in any sense heavy or savoring of propaganda. Its dominant tone is one of whimsicality. The story is simple: A Scotch man of affairs, campaigning for the presidency of the Scotch parliament, makes the fatal mistake of kicking down his stairs a poor woman who has come to beg for the life of her little dog, which is being taken from her because of her failure to pay a tax on it. A young newspaper writer plays up the incident; it looms into a national scandal and the hypercritical politician's career is knocked into a cocked hat. But the sheer momentum the story gathers is simply remarkable, equalled by few films I have seen. The climax is effected by some rarely clever devices. Shots are shown of groups and individuals reacting with growing ire against the persecution which the politician has brought to bear on the writer, the shots being interspersed by flashes of lightning and rolls of thunder—truly a storm. And there are montage effects of the breaking of waves on the shore and the wind combing tall trees, indicating the relentlessness of natural forces, once they are aroused.

Dialect An Obstacle . . .

FOR the benefit of the hypothetical average theatre-goer it must be mentioned that the spectator is required to overlook certain things before he can enjoy the picture. Foremost of these is a Scotch dialect, which becomes a little thick on occasion and cannot then be understood. The indistinction of some of the lines is contributed to by the fact that the recording is not at all times as meticulous as in American films. Most of the principal characters, however, speak very clear English, and the action is never confusing. For another thing, there are leisurely digressions in story which some, accustomed to our streamlined plotting, may not favor. But the spectator will be more than rewarded for his forbearance by what he gets out of the picture. Devotees of good cinema, who have gotten beyond being disconcerted by superficial differences in technique between foreign and

NEW YORK TIMES' PICTORIALS

of the World War

. . . From Beginning to End . . .

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American pictures, will find the piece meaty and touched with engaging bits of originality.

Players Distinguish Themselves . . .

THE acting is superb. Rex Harrison, as the young writer, possessed of a keen sense of humor along with strong convictions on social justice, is flawless. He falls in love with the politician's daughter, by the way. Vivien Leigh, as the daughter, torn between admiration for the young man and loyalty to her father, gives a well-shaded performance. Cecil Parker balances expertly the mean and the commendable qualities of the father, making him an understandable fellow. And excellent character work is done by a host of players, including Sara Allgood. A little dog billed as Scruffy plays a prominent part in the picture and I liked him too. *Storm In a Teacup*, strangely enough, had two directors, Victor Saville and Ian Dalrymple. The conclusion of the film, unfortunately, is abrupt and arbitrary, but one will retain a very pleasurable impression of the picture as a whole.

NOT UP TO STANDARD . . .

● **ALONE**; directed by Kosintsev and Trauberg; music by Shostokovitch.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

DURING the last few weeks the motion picture section of the *New York Times* has been the battle field for the lively topic *Hollywood vs. Foreign Pictures*. Film Editor Frank Nugent pointed out that Hollywood might take a leaf from the latest dozen foreign pictures. His point is that in England and on the continent better pictures are made for less money, and he cites a number of English, French and Russian films. Howard Dietz, of the MGM publicity staff, writes a riposte. And the battle wages on merrily. It seems that Mr. Nugent is more than a bit right; but evidently he had not seen *Alone*. These Russian film producers do nothing by halves. When they make a good picture they make one like *Baltic Deputy* or *Peter the First*, outstanding films that will take their places with the great of film history.

But They Make Them Bad . . .

ON THE other hand, they can make them bad, too, and *Alone* is such an example. Ten years ago this might have been considered a good picture. Today it can receive no such consideration. The day has passed when the Russian director can throw racial types on the screen, minutes on end, and persuade his audience that he is giving it something startling. *Alone* emerges as one of the old school. There was nothing vital or interesting about the story or the characters. I was not convinced that the heroine, a school teacher sent off to Siberia out of urban Moscow to instruct native children, was real. Accustomed to the Hollywood product, I admit I am predisposed to pacing and timing and action. But then I believe the greatest of Russian directors depended on the camera to move the story, rather than moods to tell it. The cutting is spotty and executed without imagination. There are innumerable shots of peasant faces, of city dwellers' faces, of endless tracts of snow,

of clouds, of clouds sweeping across mountain tops. Occasionally the directors found time to direct their camera on the characters of the story. A word about the acting might be pertinent as well. The heroine's dramatics smacked of the handclapping, giggling school of early cinematic days. Her bovine longing for her man was ludicrous. The saving grace of the picture is the outstanding music by Dmitri Shostokovitch. The music stirred me, and almost succeeded in giving the picture a depth it most certainly would have lacked without it.

FILM INFLUENCED STAGE . . .

Reviewed by Clark Bronson

HIGH as the Heaven, a play adapted from Alfred Neumann's *Patriot*, a presentation of the Call Board Theatre at 8451 Melrose Place, is a vehicle which shows the unmistakable influence of the film. There have been some dramas within the past few years that have adapted the use of film technique in the direction as well as the production. Director William Castle has tastefully woven the use of music, off stage sound and motion picture lighting to get the best possible effects. The play itself is not a good one, and the long periods cramped the styles of both directors and actors. The vehicle is dramatic enough, but not as vital as a more modern drama might be. However, the cast made this play one of the best Little Theatre plays I have seen in two years of reviewing.

Motion Picture Material . . .

SEVERAL members of the cast have definite screen possibilities. William Rees enacting the role of the mad emperor is another Charles Laughton. His Paul was an uncanny thing, and his subtle shadings brought out all the madness the part demanded. Credit to him for such fine restraint that in less capable hands might have hammed the part. Frank Martin as Count Peter Pahlen, the Machiavelli of the Russian Court, exhibited a fine sense of timing and pacing. He is a good looking lad with a carload of stage presence and a knack of acting that makes his work outstanding. Vera Paul as the Countess Ostermann, inamorata of both the emperor and Pahlen, has similar possibilities. She had a regal air about her. Add to this her mature comely looks and a low melodious voice, and she seems to represent good motion picture material. Gordon Wallace, well known to the English stage, enacted the role of the Grand Duke and heir apparent with feeling, and shows a knowledge of acting that merits attention. Phillip Merrick's roles as Count Strogonoff, a court figure, and General Zuboff, an old war horse of many battles displayed an amazing ability to change character, voice and even mannerisms. The Call Board Theatre is one of the many operating under the Equity-Guild ruling, and is doing well. The lavishness of the production, and the evident care are compliments to all concerned.

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

THAT golden treasure of medieval literature, *Robin Hood*, screened so admirably by Warner Brothers, embodies a masterly music score by that modern troubadour, Erich Wolfgang Korngold. Already in terms of volume, the accomplishment of this internationally eminent composer is an unusual accomplishment. Few scenes are left without music. This means that Warner's have accepted about an hour and a half or fully seventy-five per cent scoring. This bears out the prediction made on this page regarding big background scores. As a matter of fact, Korngold has provided more than a background score in the conventional sense of the word, and again the music, notwithstanding outer richness and true eloquence, is never obtrusive. The music is no more "background" than technicolor is background in relation to photography. It heightens and sustains action and atmosphere to an unsurpassed degree in the annals of film music. The music is admirably suitable in character and detail. Not only does it add impulse even to the most sweeping scenes, but episodes of suspense such as various duelling scenes are endowed with increasing pressure. In an art so evidently dependent on illusion, music, and in this case Korngold's music, fulfills a vital role.

England and Love...

KORNGOLD has evolved his long and, in part, effectively modern music out of various leit motifs, the most distinguished and compelling is that of Saxon loyalty, and Robin's love for Lady Marian. The composer has dug deep and written strains which express movingly the devotion of a born cavalier for his oppressed fellowmen and for the woman he worships. It is as if Korngold had lived and experienced the emotions of fealty to England, and the ardent infatuation of the cavalierly Sir Robin. This double melody, so skillfully and convincingly sustained, builds up in the love scene, then quiets down, and again is sent soaring eloquently. This particular scene contains pages of music that could well live on as concert music, as does the battle of the sticks, of the coronation march, and that triumphant, yet by no means bombastic finale. The score is superbly orchestrated by Hugo Friedhofer in accordance with Korngold's designations, and Korngold pays ready tribute to Friedhofer's exceptional skill and sympathy as well as to Leo Forbstein's important helpfulness as general music director for Warner Brothers.

Composed Not Compounded...

MUCH film music is compounded under the stress of working conditions and hurry. Speed was a prime requirement also for Korngold who arrived from Vienna little more than in time to absorb the mood of the picture and to put down the music which fills the pages of a bulky piano score. His has nevertheless composed, and not merely compounded music,

music of meaning, motion and emotion. It is music of a type which will make romantic film-opera a success, provided that the librettist does not handicap the composer. There is only a brief title, and therefore musical climaxes are not prematurely dissipated. The frequent custom of walloping the public ear during a lengthy series of credit titles in itself is often a patent and painful process. Musically this kind of overture rarely leads up well to the action. (Title music for *High, Wide and Handsome*, for *Old Chicago* and *Zola* are some happy exceptions.) The *Robin Hood* title is very brief, withal Korngold succeeds in speaking his merrily boisterous and brave and warmly felt melodic declaration of faith in merrie old England, in *Robin Hood*, and his men of Sherwood Forest, in *Lady Marian* and the buoyancy of a time when men loved and died well.

Testing A Theory...

THERE are no two ways about this music of Korngold, which moves so wholly in accord with the events on the screen. It is more than a screen score but rather a continuous tone-poem. When I say continuous I am aware, of course, that there occur pauses in the music, and I confess that I was as regretfully aware of the absence of music, as I enjoyed its presence. The problem of "music-all-the-time" is an extremely difficult one and it will take time and practical try-outs to test the wisdom of such a course. It is practically impossible to judge so rich a double-production as the visual and audible *Robin Hood* upon a single performance. As I recall it, music was omitted in certain episodes of dialogue. It would be interesting to hear this dialogue with music, not necessarily related, psychologically or dramatically, but purely atmospherically. Again such atmospheric music could have its bearing on the conversation. For instance, when Prince John and his henchmen plot against Robin Hood, or against the King, one could hear soldiers marching, drums, horses or effects of this kind indicating time, place and preparations. It also takes studio time to try out such atmospheric music. Any good composer, fertile-minded and dramatically-alert could write it fast enough.

Primary and Secondary...

ONE might differentiate then between primary and secondary scoring. The former is of the kind heard most of the time in *Robin Hood*, while closely fitting action in gesture, tempo or significance of development and intent of eventual action. Everything is called background music, but that seems a misleading term. I think that Korngold's music is ideal foreground music. An orchestra score in an opera would not be called "background" music, even if the orchestral writing were entirely apart, thematically, from the vocal lines of the singer. Fortunately, there was

no *viva voce* singing in *Robin Hood*. All the "singing" occurred in the eminently songful music of Korngold and in the excellently song-like phrasing of the splendid recording. The latter sounded well although some of the dynamics were kept rather loud by the hand which guided the reproducing machine during the preview. But to come back to secondary scoring. That kind of scoring would be used during such episodes of dialogue suggested. It might contain character motifs or motifs relating to previous or pending events, but it would be music of implication rather than openly descriptive. On the other hand, it would be futile to lay down a rule. Film music must be flexible as an art..

Privilege or Purpose . . .

AS I am trying to recall this magnificent and moving double-creation *Robin Hood*, it seems to me that music relives the nobility and tenderness of the story more captivantly than the screen. This is not just another way of implying that I consider the music the best part of the entire production. That would be absurd and the music, while strong enough of ideas and feeling to live by itself, is definitely indebted to the film. No, Korngold has wisely and willingly grasped the composer's opportunity of tonally acting out to the fullest what these well-directed actors could properly only indicate within the reserve of histrionic and theoretic delineation. That actor-king is the more majestic who does not—figuratively speaking—slap the crown on his head and wave the scepter like a dog-whip. That lover on the screen is the more winsome to the lovely ladies (on and off the studio lot), whose courting promises more than gesture, glance and chosen word denote. Music is the inflection supreme of screen action, and Korngold has most handsomely combined the privileges and purposes of the musical score.

Panorama In Sound . . .

IT IS not easy to single out certain melodic-harmonic or instrumental bits from Korngold's *Robin Hood* score. Like the film, so the score is a swiftly unrolling panorama in which lovely and impressive scenes are linked by the general character and by definite threads of tonal ideas. Just as the directors employ a definite idiom of speech, of dramatic address in keeping with the historic-human character of the film, so Korngold has his good reasons for rollicking and noble, for sustained and rhythm-bristling, quickly accentuated episodes. The arrestingly fine thing about this score is that it is new, that it sounds inspired by and written for the occasion. Never does the listener have the taste of being served something "warmed over" from the portfolio of a man who has written much. The orchestra sings with the inwardness of a musician who has been moved himself by the film. It is radiant with vividness of forests and castle, alive to the pageantry of the subject. Korngold cleverly introduces England's oldest folktune, *Summer Is I-cumen In*, and who knows but that it was hummed by one

of Robin's men before John of Fornsete, clerk at Reading Abbey, wrote it down some seven centuries ago.

Intriguing Details . . .

I CAN make only a few suggestions so as to prepare picture patrons for the absorbing richness of *Robin Hood*, music and screen. The double motif of love for England, and love for Lady Marian, is inspirational and it moved me deeply every time it passed through a score, abundant in ideas, yet sufficiently persistent in melodic reiteration to allow the ear a certain rest, to create familiarity and impetus by renewed hearing. Korngold's modernisms have that primitive, archaic flavor which one finds in English Tudor and early Netherlandish music, and which music at times contains remarkably modern dissonances in its typically primitive procedure of harmony. The battle with the sticks and the interlude on the lute is charming and genuinely conceived in its tellingly apportioned recitative phrases. The pomp of the castle and of the scene of archery is splendid. Korngold follows each of Mr. Blanke's scenes to its climax and still adds more life and a continuity which connects visual scenes by the flux of music. In the banquet scene the Englishness of *Beggar's Opera* music is recalled. There is humor and power. Those are two of the principal elements of this score, humor and power. Add to that an irrepressible sense of the lithe and resilient, and heartfelt ardor, and the winsome secrets of Korngold's *Robin Hood* music are explained.

BELOW THE WASTE

By Don Quixote

IT MIGHT seem that the operator of a large and important motion picture theatre chain, who is at the same time president of one of the biggest film companies, would know what is best for the industry. Not so in the case of Barney Balaban, president of Paramount Pictures, and also president of the Balaban & Katz circuit. In a recent address President Balaban stated that the Balaban & Katz circuit would continue to play double bills because the houses earned money that way, Sam Goldwyn and the PTA notwithstanding. Mr. Balaban knows a lot more about profitable theatre operation than I do. And perhaps the ticket sales of his box-offices should be the final judge. However, the president's decision to run two features in the theatres of his circuit will have a weighty influence in deciding the policies of Paramount pictures.

A Spade a Spade . . .

CALLING the cards as they fall, Paramount's 1936-37 season will be remembered by many exhibitors as the year which produced the company's poorest product. A cursory analysis of box-office tallies will reveal the low pulling power of Paramount

pictures. Since the Balaban & Katz circuit is a factor in the Paramount Publix system, it buys Paramount pictures first. It is not unreasonable to deduce, therefore, that the B & K buying policy has much to do with Paramount's producing policy, since Mr. Balaban is an executive in both corporations. Paramount is therefore encouraging the dual bill program, and with it the resultant poor quality of product. B & K's competitors have to show double features because Mr. Public thinks two pictures is giving him more for his money than one. However, within the recent past, the same Mr. Public is becoming more motion picture conscious. And Chicago is one of the localities that has had recent single feature program agitation.

Effect on Production . . .

HOWEVER, more important to the industry is the effect of Mr. Balaban's point of view. A double feature policy on the B & K circuit means extensive production at Paramount. Mr. Balaban, therefore, proposes that Paramount and the exhibitors throughout the country have to be the goats for the sake of his chain. Pictures are consequently fashioned for production profits with no thought of exhibitor profits. With the dual program a bi-product of excessive production, studios are forced, because of box-office results, to sell two pictures for a price they might command for one. They are receiving the same income but expending twice as much as they have to. One of the highlights of the New Orleans opening of *The Buccaneer* was Cecil B. de Mille's address before a convention of exhibitors. He said, in effect, that exhibitors were unfair in their refusal to pay higher prices for the Paramount product, and that unless they consented to lower percentages for themselves pictures would suffer. Mr. de Mille's position is a rather anomalous one. Although a unit producer, seldom making more than two pictures a year and therefore in an enviable position to make good pictures at a minimum cost, he finds the income insufficient. He could not have been speaking in behalf of the two or three epics he produces annually.

Balaban on Economy . . .

GETTING his signals mixed, Mr. Balaban announced on April 28, midst fanfare and furbelow, that Paramount and other companies must economize. He hastened to add that there would be no Paramount salary cuts and no wholesale employee discharges, but that economy would be in effect. Perhaps he was thinking of the good sum paid to Emanuel Cohn, *not* to make a picture. The obvious way to economize is to make fewer pictures. And the obvious way to increase earnings is to make better box-office pictures. And the obvious way to both economize and make more money at the selling end is to make fewer pictures with greater care. However, Mr. Balaban's dicta anent paring costs are momentary will-o'-the-wisps, because the B & K circuit is still going to show double features, Hell and Hollywood and Hays be damned.

CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by
RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD
of
MABEL KEEFER

HAD a note on my little scratch pad about Leatrice Joy Gilbert's lovely speaking voice, but on referring to Mr. Beaton's review of *Of Human Hearts*, I find that he has taken the words right out of my mouth—that is, right off of my pad. But he did not mention one of the best players in the cast of that picture—*Pilgrim*, the horse—and I cannot make up my mind whether to be indignant about it, or be glad that it gives a chance to write about him. He made me think of the white horse I played with when I was a very small child. Preferred playing with the horse to playing with dolls. I should like to write *Pilgrim* a fan letter, only I have a feeling that it might be disloyal to that other gentleman that I admire so much—Leo M-G-M. And so I am in a quandary or something.

* * *

PITY the poor composer who has to hear his music roared to the motion picture by unintelligent regulation of sound volume. If producers and exhibitors could be brought to realize the connection between psychological effect and the box-office, there would be specific instructions for the operation of the sound control box (or whatever it is) sent out with every film; the details having been worked out in the studio by a musician of taste; and the exhibitor would see that those instructions were carried out to the letter.

* * *

LAST night, while listening to Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D minor*, I found myself thinking: And the man who wrote that would stop his writing to cut slices of brown bread and spread them with honey, for his children, or leave his composing to help his wife with her household duties. Truly, simplicity is greatness.

* * *

SOMETHING for picture directors to mull over: When boy sings to girl he should sing to her and not to an audience, which means that he should depend on tone color to put the song over—not volume. And he should not grin at her like a Cheshire cat. Likewise, when girl listens to boy singing, instead of staring straight at him with a set smile on her lips, she should gaze into space once in a while—a close-up should show a far-away look in her eyes—and her mouth should be a bit wistful, with perhaps a hint of breathlessness.

* * *

MY DEAR MR. BEATON: An orange I'm eatin', and it cost me four round copper cents. Seems you're over-zealous to make people jealous, and in their contentment make dents. No person benign would write of a sign, "Oranges, 12 doz., 25 cts.,"

when he knows that his readers who live with the cedars, will be moved to long, loud laments. One hates to believe—in fact, one would grieve—that a gentleman in your position should really be callous and hold so much malice stored up within his disposition. But we stifle our ire, and heap coals of fire, by giving all due recognition to the fact that you're clever—no dull phrases ever—now aren't you full of contrition?

* * *

ADOLF and BILL flew over the hill, to get them some power and glory. They've got it just now, but, I do wonder how it will be at the end of the story?

* * *

WELL, little scratch pad, I spent a most delightful evening with *Judge Hardy's Children*. Judging from what seemed to be a pleased and enthusiastic reaction from the audience, and the comments I have heard, I would say that we all liked it "a whole bunch and everything, tew, don't you?"

* * *

HOPE producers will not decide that the cycle for fairy stories is with us, and try to emulate *Snow White*. Wonder if they know that one definition for the word "cycle" is "An imaginary circle in the heavens?"

* * *

HELEN KELLAR is blind and deaf—so we say—but, read what she writes in the *New York Herald Tribune*: "I am happy because, catching an unmistakable plant odor, I know everything is green. Pink seems to me like dainty musical notes, smooth as apple blossoms, drifting down from the boughs." How many of us, with out eyes wide open looking at drifting apple blossoms, hear dainty musical notes? Read again: "When I enter a wood . . . I keep stepping aside to observe the varied positions in which trees grow and the fascinating irregularities with which their boughs spread out, interlock or arch downward." So many of us who have our sight do not know there are such things as trees, unless the mechanism of our automobile fails to work, and we hit one.

* * *

THREE things I should like to know: If the distorted shoulder line prevalent in women's coats and suits is considered attractive; if the film industry really intends to cut down its gigantic expenditure, and if the sale of Royal Baking Powder has increased since its endorsement by the President's mother.

* * *

TWO of my office associates have advanced what seems to be an excellent idea. They suggest that a short film be made depicting the faults, foibles, idiosyncracies and what not of the average motion picture audience. Heading the list would be: Women who fail to remove their hats (the hats that really are hats); people who talk loudly—particularly those who tell what is going to happen next; loud laughter that covers the screen dialogue, and, most of all, laughing in the wrong places—that is, at something

that is perhaps pathetic, or even tragic, but which a certain type of person seems to think screamingly funny. I sometimes wonder if that sort of thing might be caused by a nervous reaction, or if it is just plain dumbness?

* * *

EDITOR BEATON'S reference to Herbert Hoover, in the April 16 issue of the *Spectator*, has started a train of thought that gathers momentum as it travels through my brain, and I am becoming a bit dizzy from speculating on possibilities. What would happen to the country if some morning Herbert Hoover woke up and found himself back in the White House? (Not that I think he will.) One instinctively feels that he is a man who profits by experience, and that, coupled with the opportunity for observation of the last five years, ought to add up to something. As the French say, "It gives one to think!"

* * *

GREY OWL, the noted Indian naturalist of whom I wrote in a recent *Spectator*, has been called to the happy hunting grounds. He died in a hospital at Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, April 13, but I imagine his spirit is hovering over the Canadian forests—particularly the Mississauga country that he loved so well. Grey Owl was recognized by the Canadian government as one of the most practical proponents of conservation, and last December gave a command performance before King George VI and Queen Elizabeth of the motion pictures of Canadian wild life which he had produced to bolster his appeal for the protection of the animals. This son of the forest recognized the potency of the screen as a medium to influence the ideas and ideals of a people, and used it for that purpose.

* * *

COMMENTS on *In Old Chicago*, which has just been shown in this town, seem to be running about neck and neck for and against, although no one seems to register a great deal of enthusiasm for it. I did not see it myself—not feeling in the mood for a conflagration.

* * *

JUST read that about 100,000,000 feet of motion picture film was exported from the United States last year. Wonder if that means film in the "raw" for use by foreign producers, or does it mean finished picture film? If it means the latter, that might explain why some pictures were too long—the industry was aiming for a record footage.

* * *

WHERE do some people get the quaint idea that telling a risqué story is a badge of cleverness? As a matter of fact, it denotes a paucity of intellect.

* * *

HEARD a young man describing a girl he had just met, as being "like a breath of mountain air—like the wind whispering in the pine branches," and "she has a smile like rippling water." Hmm. . . . What hasn't the Spring done to that young man's fancy?

CAMERA ANGLES

By Robert Joseph

FOR three reasons Hollywood may have cause to remember 1938. One of them is the falling off of box-office grosses. The second is the low ebb of production. And the third is B. N. Judell. Nor are the three items unrelated. For Progressive Films, B. N. Judell's producing company, is an answer to the other two. Coming out of the Middle West where he controls an extensive exchange system, Ben Judell hoped he had the answer to the exhibitor's prayer. Discovering that exhibitor film contracts were priced and based on incomes from preceding good years, and that exhibitors were earning little enough on such terms, he decided to invade the film market. He engaged the use of Grand National offices and sound stages and began to make his first picture, *Delinquent Parents*.

* * *

What the Exhibitor Wants . . .

EXCHANGES operating in Chicago, St. Louis, Milwaukee, Indianapolis, Detroit and Kansas City will supply exhibitors with Progressive Films. Progressive pictures are box-office made, for Judell has had years of experience as an exhibitor and then as a distributor himself. He has no delusions of grandeur, wants no Academy awards, and wears a single breasted, three-button business suit at all times. To some his behaviour is open effrontery to Hollywood, for he seeks and wants no part of the local limelight. His business is making pictures. As added proof that Judell means business he points out that there will be no Hollywood previews of his product. "Not that I have any reason to be ashamed of what I'm doing. But what purpose can a preview serve me? The best they'll say about what I'm doing is: 'It's a good indie picture.' I don't have to go out of my way for that kind of reaction." Judell's attitude is a little startling perhaps. But understandable. His financial ties are not local; his obligations involve no one. He sees what he wants, asks for it, pays for it. Nothing on the cuff.

Unit Production . . .

THE *modus operandi* of Progressive Films has much to commend it. Judell believes in unit production. For his first three pictures, just completed, he employed the services of Melville Shyer and Lon Young as associate producers. Although Judell is the boss

and the man who controls the purse strings, and although he has a good showmanship point of view, he does not permit that to conflict with the technical operations of his staff. It is reported that he drops in on his stages during shooting, and is one of the few producers in the business who does not tell the gaffer how to gaff, the director how to direct, the actors how to act and the propmen how to prop. The responsibility of production is, of course, his; but he has uncommon faith in the men he hires.

Quality of Production . . .

THE production schedule of Progressive Films, the first exhibitor-distributor set-up in the business, calls for forty-two pictures. Judell's announcement comes at the psychological moment when Hollywood seems to be groping its way to a firmer basis. Based on good solid experience, built around stories that are politely termed "controversial," shrewdly titled, such as *Delinquent Parents*, *Wayward Daughters*, *Scandal House*, Progressive Films seems to have what it takes. Nor is there the flavor of amateurism or quickie operations hovering around the place. In addition to the services of Shyer and Young, Judell has engaged Film Editor Roy Luby. Luby is recognized as one of the best cutters in the business among the smaller producing studios. Aside from being one of the most prolific cutters in terms of screen credits, he has an outstanding reputation as a cutter of low budget pictures. Charles Lamont, Nick Grinde and Jean Yarbrough have been engaged as directors. And box-office names like Craig Reynolds, Pert Kelton, Maurice Murphy, Terry Walker, Adrienne Ames and Theodore von Eltz will help promote the pictures. Judell's Progressive pictures is an exhibitor-distributor-producer experiment that concerns itself with the single task of making pictures. As such it demands Hollywood's attention.

* * *

MINOR NOTES ON A MAJOR THEME . . .

YANK AT OXFORD will do more to cement good will between Britain and this country than three disarmament pacts, two protocols of peace, and six treaties of collective security . . . and yet, carrions, birds of advertising prey, caw "no propaganda, no propaganda" in an attempt to keep their orange wings clean. . . . Three men, so reports *Today's Cinema*, hijacked a print of *Victoria the Great* from the projection room of a Dublin, Ireland, theatre. . . . Raymond Scott's *Toy Trumpets in Sunnybrook Farm* is a thing to hear. . . . Mehitabel, Mabel Keefer, is not as dumb as I think. The other night in her particular lingo she said, "John Barrymore in *Romance In the Dark* says more wit' his dukes than he says wit' his mout'." Which means, I guess, that pantomime is still the most dramatic form of self-expression. . . . Now *Time* is the ants in Quigley's Sunday picnic. Why won't the world behave itself and run according to the Quigley Plan? . . . Modern Film Group is showing outstanding international motion pictures, a series of five that include *The Wave*, *A Nous La Liberte* and *Alone*. Hollywood should find a place for a permanent organization of this kind.

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SPECTATOR

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—May 14, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 5

Guilds Should Stand Pat

Efforts of Producers to Force Directors Guild to
Abandon Assistant Directors and Unit
Managers Should Meet With
United Opposition



Bruno Ussher Is Not At All Satisfied With
the Way Sound Is Handled in Theatres



SWISS MISS ★ CRIME SCHOOL ★ HOLD THAT KISS ★ ONE WILD NIGHT
GUN LAW ★ BLIND ALIBI ★ DIVORCE OF LADY X ★ THE LADY IN THE MORGUE

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EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM



From the EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

PROBABLY the whole history of organized labor does not reveal a condition which parallels that existing in Hollywood. Not being interested sufficiently in the past to care greatly how near the truth my impression of the movement came, I regarded unionism largely as something its leaders used to achieve their ambitions for leadership and easy living. Somewhere in the process of my mental development I suppose I acquired an employer complex, had the capitalistic viewpoint even though I lacked the capital to explain it. Since unionism—using the word in its broader sense—has become an issue in the conduct of Hollywood studios, my conception of the movement has gone through the revolutionizing process. Instead of leaders springing from nowhere and being susceptible to the suspicion of having personal, selfish motives, I find the movement headed by people who already have everything of a material nature they could expect the world to give them, and who are actuated solely by a desire to improve the conditions of those who are placed less fortunately.

AS AN example, let us take the Screen Directors' Guild and scan its list of elected officers: King Vidor, president; Lewis Milestone, first vice-president; Frank Tuttle, second vice-president; Richard Wallace, secretary; John Ford, treasurer. Directors: Herbert Biberman, John Cromwell, Howard W. Hawks, Wesley Ruggles, Rouben Mamoulian, William A. Wellman, A. Edward Sutherland, Frank Capra, Gregory La Cava, Phil Rosen. The men listed above can get all they want from their employers merely for the asking. Why, then, are they giving long hours of their time, working far into the night to increase the strength of the Guild, to formulate its principles, and to make its position clear to the

producers? It cannot be for anything they themselves want, as each of them already has everything and none has a personal importance complex. Their sole desire is to give a leg-up to those who have not climbed as far as they have.

WE FIND the same worthy principles actuating the conduct of the Writers' Guild and the Actors' Guild, in both of which the most active leaders are people of assured position lending their support to groups which are not strong enough to go it alone and get anywhere. For the past quarter of a century the conduct of the film industry's business has been along lines which have led directly and inevitably to the present organization situation. Producers never have given a thought to the welfare of the people whose brains were responsible for the extraordinary growth of the industry. It has assumed proportions in spite of the producers, not by virtue of what they contributed in the way of understanding and fair dealing.

THERE were two classes of workmen, vastly important cogs in the production wheels, but not strong enough as individuals even to give the necessary strength to organizations of their own, who needed some powerful friend at court if they were to obtain for themselves the recognition, emoluments and conditions to which the nature of their work entitled them—assistant directors and unit managers. They and the directors formed three guilds, but only that of the directors had the real strength necessary to impress the producers. Such being the case, the Directors' Guild, with nothing whatever to gain for itself, but wholly with a desire to be of service to the other two guilds, coupled their demands with its own in its negotiations with the

studios. Knowing its own strength, the Directors' Guild wished to put it at the service of the assistant directors and unit managers.

THE producers broke off negotiations with the directors, not for any reason that affected that guild as a unit, but because of its alliance with the other two guilds. "Toss the assistant directors and unit managers overboard," the industry said in effect, "and we will recognize you as the bargaining body for all directors." The action of the producers put the directors in a position to say to their allies, "Sorry, boys, but we've done all we can for you. From now on you are on your own." But the Directors' Guild—still with nothing to win and possibly the lack of recognition by the producers to lose—is not made of the stuff that would permit its forsaking its allies. It is standing pat, as it sees in the producers' action an effort to reduce the strength of each of the three allied groups by breaking the bond which unites them.

I AM not aware what future action is contemplated by the Directors' Guild or by the others, but it is a certainty that a continued united front will bring producers to the yielding point. They alone are responsible for conditions which led logically to their workers uniting to secure a fair deal. All trade unionism is the outgrowth of conditions created by employers. No contented workman ever led contented workmen in a movement to have conditions changed. I am not well posted on the functions of unit managers, but my fifteen years of close contact with Hollywood studio operations has convinced me that the average assistant director should be drawing more salary than the average front-office executive.

LET me elaborate on my claim that Hollywood producers give no thought to the welfare of their employes. I quote a paragraph by Harrison Carroll which appeared in the Los Angeles Herald-Express last week: "Long distance casting item. Paramount saw a shot of Nigel Brock, Colin Tapley's uncle, in the footage of Booloo brought back from Singapore. They have wired him to jaunt the 10,000 miles from Sydney, Australia, where he lives, to come to Hollywood for a screen test. If suitable, he gets a contract." Only by bringing to mind scores of other inci-

dents equally idiotic which are recorded in red ink in the producers' books, can we believe that Paramount has performed this feat of super idiocy. No matter what the part, the nature of the characterization or its importance to the picture, there already are in Hollywood a few score players, any one of whom can give a thoroughly satisfactory performance in it.

THE Film Relief Fund is taking care of many players who served pictures faithfully, who still are at the peak of their power to bring scenes to life, but whom the film industry is too near-sighted to notice while its eyes are fixed on recruiting fields ten thousand miles away. That is the kind of treatment screen workers can expect to continue until they themselves put a stop to it. Among the guilds' demands made thus far I have found none which was unreasonable and the granting of which would not eventually profit the producers as much as it would the members of the guild making it. At all costs there must be no weakening in the bond which now unites directors, assistant directors and unit managers. A solid front will bring complete victory.

* * *

TAKING CARE OF BUCK . . .

ONE of my not-very-far-away neighbors in the Valley is a great and famous actor whom I visit and commune with now and then. For some reason which strengthens my conviction that picture producers are a screwy lot, my actor friend does not appear on the screen regularly. A series of pictures in which he played the leading role would do enormous business at the box-office, but as yet we have no producer sufficiently intelligent to realize it. Nor is Metro sufficiently intelligent to capitalize his fame. I saw him in *Hold That Kiss* last night (see page 6) and saw no mention of his name in the cast. But I learn from another member of the cast that Metro is not insensible to the welfare of the player and has taken steps to see that he enjoys a pleasant and materially comfortable old age. My friend's name is Buck, and he is the most gorgeous St. Bernard dog of my acquaintance. When Metro paid him for his *Hold That Kiss* job, it made a deduction from his check for the Old Age Pension Fund. That is a fine gesture and it should tickle Buck immensely, should send him into future scenes full of the zest which springs from assurance that his future is assured. Of course, there is the disturbing element of heirs in case he dies before he spends all his pension fund. The young fellow has done a bit of running around in his time and there is no saying how numerous or widely distributed his descendents are. However, I suppose Metro has thought of that. A studio sufficiently solicitous of a dog's old age as to hold back

some of his earnings for a pension no doubt will devise plans to meet family complications if they arise.

* * *

SOMETHING THEY OVERLOOKED...

COCKTAIL time at a Beverly Hills home brought together eighteen people fully representative of those we find in the upper bracket of socially important personages. I made the nineteenth and the only one whose weekly income was not in the four figures. There were four directors who can dictate their own terms to producers; four actors and five actresses, each a star with a world famous name; four writers and one producer. Laymen husbands and wives brought the party up to about thirty in number. The talk turned to travel and finally all of us got into it. Everyone present had been to Europe, six had visited Russia, two had penetrated far into Africa, three had made round-the-world trips, nine had been in Egypt—and not a single person in the group, except Mrs. Spectator and I, had visited the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, the world's most stunning sight and within a little more than a dozen hours driving time from Hollywood.

Both Ways to Infinity...

STARTING when Time itself was young, the Grand Canyon is still but a youth with endless ages yet to live. Of all the wonderful things there are on earth, it is perhaps the only one which defies description, which humbles all writers by reaching beyond the limits of their skill. Stretching both back and forward to infinity, the most spiritually valuable possession of the United States, the only thing for which no other country has even an equivalent, the Grand Canyon should be the end of one trail for every questing mind. Composed of a thousand towering peaks, so modest they start a mile below you and come only to your feet, it still does not hold you solely by virtue of the majesty of its visual appeal. It is not just something to see. It is something to commune with, its silence a sermon you should hear, its awful beauty something you must feel. Look down into its depths and you can not be lonely even if you are alone. It is scenery with a soul; it is alive, vibrant in its lack of life and movement; gaudy in its raiment, it yet has majestic dignity unmatched by that of anything else on earth.

Ever Changing Moods...

THE Grand Canyon is not a place you should visit but once. Some of the greatest minds in the world make yearly pilgrimages to it. I have met people in Europe who have visited America only to see it. The product of the turbulent mood of perhaps a million centuries, each carving, it may be, but a hand's span of inches, it has achieved magnitude which challenges intelligence and at the same time stuns it. Over two hundred miles long, fourteen miles across, crowded with temples, cathedrals, monuments that only the Master Sculptor could create, one can not see it all in a lifetime of looking. It changes color with every caprice of the sun and passing clouds, has as many

moods as it has inlaid peaks. As I approached Hopi Point one evening to catch the sunset spectacle, a man was leaning on the rail. He pointed to one great pillar many miles away. "I never before saw quite that coloring," he remarked to me. He was Victor Patrosso, for fifteen years manager of all the big Fred Harvey interests there, El Tovar Hotel, Bright Angel Lodge, Phantom Ranch at the bottom of the Canyon, and the various correlated activities. After fifteen years of his gazing, a setting sun had something new to offer him.

Attention to Creature Comforts...

MENTION of my friend Victor suggests the importance to a Canyon visitor of the creature comforts it provides. I have made no effort to describe its indescribable visual and spiritual appeal, but I can speak with authority on the creature comforts one can enjoy when visiting the Canyon. A lumpy bed or a cup of limpid coffee can reduce somewhat the esthetic joy even a Grand Canyon sunrise can give an early riser, and good digestion always should wait upon a sunset. Even on the rim of the mighty bowl in which nature has crowded the bewildering results of eons of carving, we find a lesson in the value of personality, which should appeal to a colony whose main occupation is exploiting it. As soon as I first met Victor Patrosso I realized his was the personality reflected in every hotel and lodge activity, in the cheerfulness, efficiency, and willingness to serve of all the Harvey personnel. The service is perfect, the meals superb, the atmosphere of the institutions such as to make the visitor contented. Victor, handsome as a Greek god, the soul of unobtrusive hospitality, and the last word in hotel efficiency, is largely responsible for the pleasure one gets from a visit to Nature's most amazing creation.

* * *

SCREEN'S GREATEST CLOSE-UP...

FROM an Omaha high-school student comes a request for me to assist him in the preparation of a talk he is scheduled to make to a Motion Picture Appreciation class next month, by telling him what I consider the greatest close-up I ever saw on the screen, and why. I wrote him that the close-up was one of Shirley Temple. It appeared in a Paramount picture three or four years ago. Gary Cooper played her father, and Carole Lombard her step-mother. Shirley loved her father, was proud of him. Their mutual love was a feature of the picture. When either said, "Honor bright," it was accepted by the other as a pledge of the truth of the statement it referred to. Gary was mixed up with a gang of crooks—I am somewhat hazy as to details—and came into possession of stolen jewels which for safe-keeping he hid in Shirley's Teddy Bear. Shirley had asked him if he had anything to do with the robbery. He said he had not. "Honor bright?" she asked. He hesitated for only a moment, then said, "Honor bright." The scene was in Shirley's bedroom; Gary kissed her good-night, and the completely satisfied girl, when

alone, told her Teddy Bear how happy she was. She found the jewels at a moment when her face reflected the greatest happiness; her smiles disappeared as she gazed at the jewels; to her eyes came a look of real anguish, then tears, then sobs as she flung her head on the pillow and moaned, "And he said, 'Honor bright!'" It is the greatest close-up I ever saw because the camera never left Shirley's face from the moment Gary left her until she spoke the line; because it registered every moment of her emotional passage from complete happiness to deep despair without a single cut, and because she made it so poignantly powerful that it made the audience cry. That close-up convinced me that Shirley was the greatest actress in pictures, and everything she has done since has strengthened the conviction. Anyone who can appear in the pictures Century has given her and maintain her position at the top of the box-office list, must be a great actress, and that is what Shirley has done.

* * *

DIRTINESS DRAWS DIVIDENDS...

HORACE McCOY, who wrote probably the filthiest book ever written about Hollywood, received, as part of his reward for his literary endeavors, a contract to write scenarios for Paramount. Knopf, publisher of the book, offers it as an authentic representation of social conditions in the film capital, and Paramount in giving McCoy a good job, indicates its approval of him as an author. Writing for profit such filth as McCoy puts in his book is mental prostitution which, by comparison, makes physical prostitution appear respectable.

* * *

PRODUCERS AND THEIR STYLE...

PRODUCERS of pictures develop style as marked in some instances as definitely as the works of some writers, painters, composers whose creations can be recognized without the assistance of signatures. The pictures of the late Irving Thalberg were noted for the "Thalberg touch," which was merely the expression of the Thalberg personality, of Irving's style of doing things. It is an illusive thing which all his productions reflected. Perhaps it best can be defined as "niceness." Irving never offended the sensibilities of his audience, never permitted bad taste to be displayed in the treatment of a screen story. Coarseness, vulgarity, bad taste were in his pictures when the stories demanded them, but they were legitimate elements of the characterizations, and as such gave no offence. The Walt Disney style is comparable to that of Irving. It is the distinguishing feature of all the Disney creations, the characteristic which gives them an even level of box-office strength. It expresses Walt's personality, a clean, decent outlook on life. As was the case with Irving, Walt makes his pictures to please himself, makes them conform to his own conception of good taste. I doubt if he always could express in words his reason for a decision for the inclusion or elimination of a given scene. He *feels* his pictures, and allows his feelings to govern his

production activities. Only artists who please themselves, please the greatest number of patrons.

Henry Blanke's Good Record...

NOT a great many producers reveal a common style in all their pictures. The conviction is growing within me that the one with the most definite individual style is Henry Blanke, a member of Hal Wallis's production staff at Warners. At first glance one might doubt that such diversified pictures as *Jezebel*, *Robin Hood* and *Petrified Forest* have anything in common or that similarity exists between *Anthony Adverse*, *Life of Emile Zola* and *Green Pastures*, to mention some of the notable pictures Henry has made, yet if you can recall them you must agree they had the common touch of "niceness," that nothing but good taste was displayed in all of them. But just as it is difficult to name explicitly the nature of the "Thalberg touch," or what makes Walt Disney's pictures so successful, so is it difficult to put your finger on what Henry Blanke does to all his productions to make them so uniformly entertaining. To his credit he has the greatest number of distinguished pictures to come from one producer during the past two years, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Story of Louis Pasteur*, *The White Angel*, being some additions to those I already have mentioned. And Blanke is only fairly started on his producing career. If there were such a thing in creative work as one artist being the successor of another, I think time will demonstrate that Henry Blanke will be the successor of Irving Thalberg. However, if some producer is wise enough to start making motion pictures again, to him will go, all the honors, and Henry will have to content himself with the talkie championship.

* * *

TRAILING SOMEWHAT BEHIND...

VARIETY (N. Y.) tells of an Oklahoma City reporter who in touring the state last month came to a town whose motion picture house displayed the sign, "Preview Tonight." Nosing around, he discovered the picture to be previewed was *Hell's Angels*. The manager of that house will have to step on it if he ever expects to catch up with the rest of the pack.

* * *

VICTIM OF BLOCK BOOKING...

ON A motor trip recently we stopped for the night in Needles and I had a chat with one of the men who contribute to the upkeep of Hollywood—C. A. Simons, proprietor and manager of the little city's only picture house. He is definitely opposed to block booking. He knows his people and would like to select the pictures he knows they would like. He tried to buy *Mad About Music* but Universal told him that to secure it he would have to buy about twenty-five other pictures with it. As all the other producing organizations do business in the same way, Simons has to pay for nearly twice the number of pictures he can show in a year. He is a helpless victim of the film industry's vicious practice of making the good pictures

sell the poor ones. As long as block-booking continues we can expect no general improvement in pictures as it is a selling system which puts a premium on mediocrity. Directors and players who contract for a share in a picture's profits are victims of block-booking. If Deanna Durbin had such a contract she would lose the revenue from *Needles* because Manager Simons refused to buy a couple of dozen pictures he could not show.

* * *

MENTAL MEANDERINGS...

WHILE listening to a mocking bird just now the thought occurred to me that there would be a terrific uproar in a zoo if an elephant could make as much sound in proportion to size as the bird I am listening to can.... My favorite radio program: the Ford Sunday Evening Hour; fine music, a thoughtful talk and no offer to give you something if you will forward a hub cap of a Ford car.... If all lawyers were decent, none would have accepted Jackie Coogan's mother and step-father as clients.... In gardening, I find, the cost of operating is a consideration; for instance, take the straw helmet I wear when working in the hot sun; it is beginning to wear out; it cost twenty-five cents and this is only its third year.... A one-legged bird is balancing itself on the edge of the receptacle which contains the feed we put out for our grounds chorus; it seems to be happy in the enjoyment of a good breakfast; has nothing to worry about as no doubt it believes birds are built with only one leg.... Caesar Augustus, the wooden bird atop the pole in the garden and who has a stationary flight every time the wind blows, looks as if he had been in a fight; the sun has peeled the paint off his beak but he continues to go nowhere as energetically as the wind will permit.... Note to my secretary who types this stuff for transmission to the printer: The red splotch just above was made by a mulberry, a ripe one, which fell from the tree under which I am writing; it startled me greatly; if another falls on my pad, I will go indoors.... Any court decision which would make it necessary for Bernstein to go to work, could be appealed on the ground that it is cruel and inhuman treatment.... Robert Taylor and I patronize the same barber shop.... I think the Creator fashioned the Grand Canyon to keep human beings from growing too conceited.... Harking back: During World War I was chairman of the ticket committee for a patriotic bazaar; seattle society girls were competing eagerly for the honor of being first to sell one hundred dollars worth of tickets; Mr. and Mrs. Charles M. Schwab were with me in a car taking part in a parade; one of the girls asked me if I could get the steel king to buy ten dollars worth of tickets; I introduced him to her. "I'll take one thousand dollars worth," he said. The girl gasped. "And Mrs. Schwab will take one thousand dollars worth." The girl fainted.... Among the states I can't spell are Mass. and Conn., and I have a devil of a time with Louisa—with Lousa—with La.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

QUITE A NICE LITTLE THING . . .

● **HOLD THAT KISS**; MGM; producer, John W. Considine, Jr.; director, Edwin L. Marin; original screen play, Stanley Rauh; photography, George Folsey; art direction, Cedric Gibbons, John Detlie, Edwin B. Willis; wardrobe, Dolly Tree; film editor, Ben Lewis; musical score, Edward Ward. Cast: Maureen O'Sullivan, Dennis O'Keefe, Mickey Rooney, George Barbier, Jessie Ralph, Edward S. Brophy, Fay Holden, Frank Albertson, Philip Terry, Ruth Hussey, Barnett Parker.

ON THE whole a pleasing little picture that tells its story smoothly but does not give any member of its cast an opportunity to turn in anything but a routine performance. Within the limitations of the story, however, each player is entirely pleasing. The romance is shared by Maureen O'Sullivan and Dennis O'Keefe, which makes it a great picture for the Irish. Maureen is a mannequin and O'Keefe a clerk in a travel bureau; each thinks the other is a wealthy society person, and the story deals with the complications which ensue. Stretching it from opening title to fade-out makes it a bit thin in spots, but on the whole it will give satisfaction. It is the best bit of direction that Ned Marin has given us, even though it gives me an opportunity to air two of my pet peeves. Frank Albertson, playing Maureen's brother and a member of a well brought up family, wears his hat all the time we see him in his own home and on one of his two visits to the luxurious apartment in which his aunt lives. The hat throws Frank's scenes out of joint. I criticized the same thing in another picture and its director asked me why I picked out such a small detail. Each picture is but an accumulation of details, and the perfect picture is one in which all the details are attended to perfectly.

Cheap, Offensive Title . . .

THE other annoyance is the loud talking of O'Keefe in a dog show sequence, an exhibition of bad taste inconsistent with the character planted at the outset and maintained in all his other scenes. I have not mentioned the bad taste reflected in the choice of title for the picture, as I thought it would be self evident. *Hold That Kiss* is not even remotely related to any incident in the picture. It is a cheap and offensive conception of what constitutes a box-office title. But to get back to pleasanter things: One of the big assets of the picture is the presence in the cast of that great actor and grand dog, Buck, one of the most famous canines in the country, but one whose fame is not great enough, I see by the credit list, to prompt Metro to mention him as a member of the cast. Buck gives a fine performance, and I can quite understand why Director Marin expressed the wish on the set that all his human players could match Buck's efficiency before the camera (see page 3). Metro has given the picture one of those imposing and artistic productions for which it is noted and for which Cedric Gibbons is responsible. To please the women, the accomplished Dolly Tree designed some gowns so attractive they also will please the men.

George Folsey's photography and Ben Lewis' film editing play a big part in the technical excellence of the production. Stanley Raugh's script is ingeniously worked out, but I wish he had not relied so largely on dialogue.

ATTENTION, MARTIN QUIGLEY!...

● **CRIME SCHOOL**; a First National Picture; associate producer, Bryan Foy; screen play by Crane Wilbur and Vincent Sherman from a story by Crane Wilbur; directed by Lewis Seiler; dialogue director, Vincent Sherman; photography by Arthur Todd, A.S.C.; music by Max Steiner; art director, Charles Novi; film editor, Terry Morse; sound by Francis J. Scheid; gowns by N'Was McKenzie; unit manager, Lee Hugunin. Cast: Humphrey Bogart, Gale Page, Billy Halop, Bobby Jordan, Huntz Hall, Leo Gorcey, Bernard Punsley, Gabriel Dell, George Offerman, Jr., Weldon Heyburn, Cy Kendall, Charles Trowbridge, Milburn Stone, Harry Cording, Spencer Charters, Donald Briggs, Frank Jaquet, Helen MacKellar, Al Bridge, Sibyl Harris, Paul Porcasi, Jack Mower, Frank Otto, Ed Gargan, James B. Carson.

AN ENGROSSING sociological study. Too drab in theme and locale to provide a disturbed world with the kind of mental relaxation it most requires at the moment, *Crime School* will not shatter box-office records even though it is an excellently written, directed and acted screen offering. Outright propaganda for prison reform, it is going to shock Martin Quigley, who once said—and likes it so well that he keeps repeating it—that the sole mission of the screen is to entertain, not to preach. He does not concede that propaganda can be made entertaining, therefore *Crime School* can expect nothing but scathing reviews in the Quigley publications. No Quigley reviewer possibly could see entertainment in it, but all others will. It will hold the close attention of everyone who sees it; it is composed of excellencies. Lewis Seiler has given it notable direction, making it one of the most intelligently directed pictures I have seen in a long time. All his players speak for the microphone, not for the top gallery, and, as I have claimed so often, that is the greatest factor in making any picture convincing by giving us the feeling we are in the midst of what is going on, not standing back and having verbal bombs hurled at us, a form of assault which the majority of directors still indulge in.

Excellent Action Throughout...

WHEN Humphrey Bogart was appearing only in villain roles, I urged that he be given sympathetic parts as he impressed me as having everything to make them successful. Here he has the hero role and makes good my claims for him. He gives a thoughtful, convincing performance, feeling his part and making his audience believe it. He is given strong competition by each of that group of ragamuffins which has become known as the "Dead End kids." Seiler's direction of the group is masterly. The boys presented an interesting problem in direction. In a sense the group is one character and had to be handled as such. In his grouping of the boys, in preserving the feeling of unity and common adherence to their misguided conception of law and order, Seiler

acquits himself brilliantly. The young fellows are clever actors, and all their cleverness is brought out. Gale Page, new to me, has the leading feminine role. She has strong appeal, proving quite equal to both the emotional and romantic phases of her role. Weldon Heyburn, Cy Kendall, Charles Trowbridge, Harry Cording and Spencer Charters are others who are to be credited with good performances.

Has Well Written Script...

CRANE WILBUR, author of the *Crime School* story, is versatile. On Bryan Foy's staff he has distinguished himself as a writer, director and actor. Vincent Sherman collaborated with him in the preparation of the screen play, and together they made a workmanlike document of it. A feature of the picture is the sympathetic musical treatment given it by Max Steiner, the music matching perfectly the tempo and mood of the scenes in which it is used as a background. When Hollywood picture minds develop to maturity, all pictures will have continuous scores, and when that time arrives we can expect great things from Steiner. Charles Novi, art director, was not given much latitude in making sets of visual attractiveness as practically all the story is told in a home for wayward boys, but he certainly did his share in the way of assisting in the creation and maintenance of atmosphere.

Bryan Foy's Opportunity...

BRYAN FOY each year is growing in stature as a producer. He made the first all-talking picture, and ever since then has relied too heavily on talking as a story-telling element. He it is who should be the first to lead the film industry back to the camera and lessened reliance on the microphone. But virtually born on the stage, I am afraid it will take Brynie a few more years to forget it and realize he is in a totally different business. But what an opportunity he has—the man who made the first picture which relied solely upon dialogue and talked all its story, thus getting as far as possible away from the fundamentals of screen art—to be the first to make

(Continued on page 10)

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EXHIBITORS' MONTHLY BUYING GUIDE

● April was not a busy preview month, but thirty-one reviews being carried in the five Spectators which bore the April date line. Among the pictures reviewed were some which were technically excellent but which hold little hope of pepping up box-office returns to a degree that will satisfy exhibitors. In the thirty-one recent pictures summarized hereunder there are a few which may bring the

people in, but most of them are just good enough examples of the kind which have brought on the serious slump in box-office earnings. These thumbnail reviews, however, do not attempt to estimate the drawing power of any picture. They are boiled-down reviews to tell exhibitors what they may expect in the way of entertainment; they themselves know what they may expect in the way of patronage.

(The figure after each title denotes date in April on which the review appeared in the Spectator)

BERNARD B. RAY

★ **IT'S ALL IN YOUR MIND** (2)—An exploitation picture that will go only in certain types of theatres, but which will do well. The exhibitor has to be wary with this one because of group opposition and pressure. An independent effort that is extremely well done. Running time, 63 minutes.

COLUMBIA

★ **THE OVERLAND EXPRESS** (9)—Here is a Western good enough to be shown in any house. Has the virtue of being about something—the inauguration of the pony express service between St. Louis and Sacramento. Buck Jones will please his fans. Drew Ebersson's direction excellent. You need not pull your exploitation punches. Running time, 55 minutes.

★ **LITTLE MISS ROUGHNECK** (9)—A real down to earth kid picture which has adult appeal as well. There's a new Edith Fellows to exploit, a kid who can really sing. Add to that Leo Carrillo who is box-office any time. A little extra promotion will net result. Running time, 62 minutes.

★ **WIDE OPEN FACES** (30)—Children will scream with excitement and hilarity, and Joe E. Brown's wide adult following will be mightily pleased too. It is the usual pot-pourri of gags, held together by a formula yarn with a traditional chase at the finish. But the piece is racy and the gags are well punctuated. If your audiences like the Brown comedies, this is their meat. Running time, 65 minutes.

GAUMONT-BRITISH

★ **SAILING ALONG** (9)—An English picture with Jessie Matthews that you need not be afraid of showing and talking about. If they like a clever musical with good dancing and good music then here it is. Jack Whiting, the leading man, is presently to be starred by Paramount and will have a name locally. Play it up big. Running time, 94 minutes.

★ **TO THE VICTOR** (16)—A really fine picture featuring some sheep dog performances which will delight dog lovers. Without American box-office names, it holds out little hope of big box-office figures, but if you can get your people in they will be delighted with it. All-British cast headed by Will Fyffe, who gives a magnificent performance. Running time, 78 minutes.

★ **THE WIFE OF GENERAL LING** (30)—Duck this one if possible. There will be walkouts and complaints, and you should not show a picture you have to hide on. No names, no story, no plot. Nothing to sell. And nothing to say. Running time, 72 minutes.

GRAND NATIONAL

★ **INTERNATIONAL CRIME** (23)—Evidently intended to be one of a series of murder mysteries, the current film relates the efforts of a newspaper columnist, "The Shadow," who makes a specialty of solving crimes, to unravel a case involving international diplomacy. Rod La-Rocque is personable as the columnist. The action is sprightly and there is a fair amount of suspense. Grist for the double bills, but satisfactory for that function. Running time, 65 minutes.

IMPERIAL

★ **BROKEN BLOSSOMS** (23)—A picture with universal appeal and one that is different. Promote this the right way, as a film of outstanding merit, tie it up with D. W. Griffith, and you will see faces in your theatre you have never seen before. This is a so-called "art" film, but properly exploited and advertised all your audiences will appreciate it.

LA COMPAGNIE DU CINEMA

★ **LUCREZIA BORGIA** (30)—Not for the average audience. Persons with special interests, students of history or of acting, may find it worth their while. Dialogue is in French, with English titles. There is nothing "hot" about the film, advertising to the contrary notwithstanding. Bare breasts are to be seen briefly in a couple of sequences, but there are few irregularities beyond that. Continuity, photography and direction are below the American standard.

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

★ **PORT OF SEVEN SEAS** (2)—Maurine O'Sullivan, Wallace Beery, Frank Morgan should mean box-office, but to offset their value is the fact that the first half hour of the picture deals with matters of little value to the story, which, however, when it finally gets under way is engrossing in a highbrow sort of way. Excellent production, good direction and fine performances. The theme a daring one of an unwed girl about to become a mother, but told with the best of taste and should please your patrons who can appreciate good screen work. Running time, 78 minutes.

★ **TEST PILOT** (23)—Here is one which will pack them in if the Gable, Loy and Tracy names mean anything to your people. In essence rather a technical exposition of flying problems, it still has enough action to thrill its audiences. All performances excellent. You can go the limit with your exploitation. Running time, 120 minutes.

MONOGRAM

★ **ROSE OF THE RIO GRANDE** (2)—A vigorously told romance, tuneful, and colorfully mounted. There is historical interest too in this tale of old Mexico, in which a

band of aristocrats attempt to drive out a bandit army which has been oppressing the people. John Carroll, of imposing stature, a good actor, and possessed of a rich singing voice, should appeal to audiences everywhere. One of Monogram's most ambitious efforts. You can book it with assurance. Running time, 60 minutes.

PARAMOUNT

★ **BAR 20 JUSTICE** (16)—A Western film considerably above the average in calibre. There is an element of mystery in this one too, some of the action centering about a trap door in a dark recess of a mine. William Boyd plays Hopalong Cassidy with his customary restraint and sincerity. There are good supporting performances, and production values are good. One of the best of the series. Running time, 66 minutes.

★ **COLLEGE SWING** (23)—If your people like swing music they should go for this one in a large way. It is nothing but swing and Martha Raye's screamed songs, ably backed up by Edward Everett Horton, Gracie Allen, George Burns, Bob Hope and Ben Blue, to mention the names which should have some marquee value. Running time, 82 minutes.

★ **STOLEN HEAVEN** (30)—Generally entertaining but with particular appeal to music lovers and those who can appreciate the intelligent application of music as part of a motion picture production. Intelligent direction by Andrew Stone, a young fellow worth watching. Running time, 85 minutes.

★ **DOCTOR RHYTHM** (30)—The picture which marked Emanuel Cohen's exit from Paramount, but if he can keep up the pace this one sets, Paramount may wish it had him back. Frank Tuttle's direction always can be counted on for satisfactory results, and he is at his best here. Bing Crosby's name as heading the cast probably is all your customers will want. Excellent entertainment which you can boost with a clear conscience. Running time, 80 minutes.

REPUBLIC

★ **INVISIBLE ENEMY** (9)—A mystery-espionage thriller that should do well at the light end of a dual biller. No names to talk of, but plenty of action and excitement, and some intelligent acting by the featured players of the cast. Running time, 65 minutes.

★ **UNDER WESTERN STARS** (16)—Entertainment for everybody; another picture which demonstrates that budget alone does not mean box-office. A Western musical of considerable merit, introducing a new star in the person of Roy Rogers who has an agreeable personality, sings nicely and gives promise of becoming an actor. Should be acceptable Saturday fare for young people. Running time, 64 minutes.

★ **KING OF THE NEWSBOYS** (23)—A nice little Bernard Vorhaus produced and directed recital of a slum boy's successful struggle to amount to something. Intelligently made and will please people who do not expect to see a million dollars on the screen every time they enter a picture house. Running time, 68 minutes.

★ **CALL OF THE YUKON** (23)—If you have animal lovers and outdoor friends this is the one to sell them. No need to blush for this one. It has action and names—Richard Arlen, Lyle Talbot and Beverly Roberts—plus a number of animals who are good actors. The animal sequences will keep them talking for a long time. Running time, 70 minutes.

R.K.O.

★ **GO CHASE YOURSELF** (16)—Not much of a picture. There are few laughs, the piece is often talkative, with lapses in the tempo of its movement and digressions in the action. Joe Penner, again the congenital idiot, undertakes to carry the picture, but it is too big a load. Nor are there any other noteworthy performances. Will get by before indiscriminate audiences; but too much stuff has already gotten by. That is the matter with the picture business. Running time, 70 minutes.

TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX

★ **BATTLE OF BROADWAY** (2)—Very loud. There is an amusing story in it, but it is told in a series of rattlety-bang vocal explosions, hard on ears and nerves and making the picture not worth the discomfort it will cause you to sit through it. It is just another of the kind the public must be getting tired of, but if your audiences can still stand rough stuff, it may get by. Running time, 80 minutes.

★ **RASCALS** (9)—One for Jane Withers fans. No doubt whatever about the fact that it will please all those who like this young star. Plenty of laughs, lively action, generous production, good direction. Running time, 77 minutes.

★ **FOUR MEN AND A PRAYER** (30)—Never hesitate over a picture directed by John Ford, he has a box-office way with him. A really fine picture which you can go all the way in exploiting as it will make good all your claims. Big in every way, with wide geographical and pictorial sweep, excellently acted, it will be a credit to any house showing it. Running time, 85 minutes.

UNIVERSAL

★ **GOODBYE BROADWAY** (2)—Goodbye profits when you show this one. A class B production with the B meaning bad. Would have been better if the players had not shouted all their lines. Poor story, poor direction, but nice production. Running time, 65 minutes.

★ **RECKLESS LIVING** (2)—No box-office names, but there is so much horse-racing and general race track stuff in it that horse lovers will love it. A modestly made class B picture, it is made convincing by the direction of Frank McDonald. Any picture which is convincing also is good entertainment. You safely may promise your patrons something worthwhile when they see it. Running time, 70 minutes.

★ **NURSE FROM BROOKLYN** (16)—An unfortunate venture, much worse than any class B picture need be. Drab story of a murder and how the police bungle the case. Nothing to recommend it. Running time, 67 minutes.

WARNER BROTHERS

★ **PENROD'S DOUBLE TROUBLE** (2)—This is light fare, but children will like it a great deal, and so should grown-ups who are fond of children. The piece is told with no great finesse, but the gang of youngsters in it, including the Mauch twins, give the film a certain ebullience. Some emotional scenes are well handled by Gene and Kathleen Lockhart. If yours is a family audience, the film should go. Running time, 60 minutes.

★ **OVER THE TRAIL** (16)—One of the most consistently good bits of entertainment one could hope for, class B as to budget, class A as to brains, and not a moment when

(Continued on page 13)

PREVIEWS

(Continued from page 7)

a picture which revealed a consciousness of the demands of screen art in the manner in which the microphone was used. If I were Brynie I would try it. In any event, I would make no more drab pictures until the world became less drab.

MUCH LAUREL AND HARDY IN IT...

● **SWISS MISS**; Hal Roach; producer, S. S. Van Keuren; director, John G. Blystone; screenplay: James Parrott, Charles Melson; original: Jean Negulesco, Charles Rogers; photography: Norbert Brodine, C. Art Lloyd; music, Phil Charig; lyrics, Arthur Quenzer. The players: Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, Della Lind, Walter Woolf King, Eric Blore, Aida Kuznetsoff, Charles Judels, Ludovico Tomarchio, Jean De Briac, George Sorel, Charles Gamore.

ALMOST exclusively for Laurel and Hardy fans who still can take the pair's comedy in exceedingly large doses. As a team Laurel and Hardy gained a stout following with short pictures, each of which dealt with one comedy episode broken into scenes which followed one another in quick succession and constituted twenty or thirty minutes of hilarity on a program which ran for two or three hours. Hal Roach's reasoning that if the public liked a quarter of an hour of the team's comedy, it would like an hour of it four times as much, is about on a par with the belief that if you like one strawberry sundae, you will enjoy four in a row four times as much. In *Swiss Miss* the comedians put on about six different acts, each a variation of what they have done a hundred times in the last dozen years. This is far too much Laurel and Hardy for one evening's program. I laughed at some of the acts, but the laughing I did would become pretty thin if stretched over the entire production. It was the same with the audience; there were no roars of laughter which used to reward the comedians when they were presented in one of their short subjects.

Produced On Big Scale...

SWISS MISS is the first of the team's feature-length pictures I have seen. I was so sure I would not like them that I left their reviewing to other *Spectator* reviewers who would approach them with more open minds; but I attended the preview of the latest in the hope that my reasoning had been faulty. For what it is, the picture is presented excellently, but I am afraid it will not do well in the big houses from which the revenue must come to make it a financial success. Whatever opinion we may hold for Hal Roach's judgement in making the picture, we must praise him for the manner in which he has made it. The production is elaborate and of great scenic value, a background of Swiss Alps permitting of much beautiful photography. There is one hair-raising sequence in which the comedians are funniest when pushing a piano across a swinging bridge which spans a chasm of great depth. It is the technical triumph of a production that technically deserves only praise.

The photography of Norbert Brodine and Art Lloyd, and the photographic effects by Roy Seawright are of exceedingly high standard. Charles D. Hall provided many artistically attractive sets and W. L. Stevens adorned them with scores of picturesque Swiss costumes worn by a group of men and women who do some excellent singing.

Story Has Tough Going...

WITH so many L & H interpolated comedy turns, it was difficult for the story to make its way through the entanglements and keep its continuity intact. Five writers are credited with the literary part of the production, and it looks as if they worked independently and spliced their individual contributions together to form the script. Even so, it is a good job of providing a typical L & H vehicle. Praise must go to John Blystone for his direction. He faulted only when he allowed Walter Woolf King to shout his lines instead of expressing himself by the feeling that he should have put into them. King and Della Lind play the leading straight roles. I would like to see them in something else before venturing an opinion of their adaptability to screen requirements. Eric Blore contributes one of his excellent comedy characterizations, and no fault can be found with any of the others who play supporting roles. Meritorious music is a big feature of the picture. Those responsible for it should be given a picture of their own free of the L & H brand of comedy. The compositions of Phil Charig and lyrics of Arthur Quenzer stand out as one of the main attractions of the picture. As a contribution to the general music excellence of *Swiss Miss* mention must be made of the direction of Marvin Hatley and the arrangements of Arthur Morton. The picture is one which required most expert film editing and that is the kind of editing Bert Jordan gave it. It is a really excellent job.

POLICEMEN GET LAUGH...

● **ONE WILD NIGHT**; 20th-Fox production and release; associate producer, John Stone; directed by Eugene Forde; screenplay, Charles Belden and Jerry Cady, based on an original idea by Edwin Dial Torgenson; photography, Harry Davis; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Haldane Douglas; film editor, Nick De Maggio; costumes, Helen A. Myron; sound, W. D. Flick and William H. Anderson; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: June Lang, Dick Baldwin, Lyle Talbot, J. Edward Bromberg, Sidney Toler, Andrew Tombes, William Demarest, Romaine Callender, Jan Duggan, Spencer Charters, Harlan Briggs.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

WHY it is that police officers are so commonly depicted in motion pictures as blundering nit-wits, would be an interesting research problem for some sociologist. Certainly our law-enforcing bodies have their shortcomings, but there is incompetence and chicanery in medical practice and in numerous other fields which are seldom shown any suspicion or disrespect by the Hollywood picture-makers. More frequently than not, however, the policeman is portrayed as an awkward, blustering ignoramus. Is it because

the screen reflects the psychology of the American public and the police officer is really of low repute throughout the country, or does Hollywood get its disrespect from some other source, perhaps from traffic cops who lurk plentifully along our sleek California highways? At any rate, there must be many theatre patrons who do not subscribe to this attitude, and they would have considerable cause for resentment in *One Wild Night*, which does an inordinate amount of police ridiculing.

Are Stupid and Dishonest . . .

THE chief of police, an important role, is such a fumbling and voracious boob that his son comes home from taking a crime course at college and proceeds to unravel a series of kidnapping cases which had stymied the whole force, evidently all as dense as his father. A police sergeant, also a prominent part, is not only a low-grade moron, but, having been entrusted with cheeking some bills for serial numbers, is shown to have concealed not a few of them on his person. All this constitutes an aspect of the picture which will keep many spectators from getting as much enjoyment from it as they might have received. Those who are not perturbed at seeing their public officials ridiculed, however, will find *One Wild Night* a diverting little B picture.

Piece Has Its Points . . .

ACTION is rapid; there are some vigorously punctuated performances, and the plot has a unique double twist at the finish. There are a good many comedy bits through the story which are well handled for laugh potency by Director Eugene Forde. Dick Baldwin plays the young up-start with freshness and vitality, and June Lang is capable as the frilly creature representing Hollywood's idea of a newspaper woman. William Demarest is amusing as an editor who is driven mad, and Lyle Talbot, J. Edward Bromberg and others are efficient. The photography is good, especially some night scenes at an old mill, being done by Harry Davis; and Nick De Maggio's editing is expert.

YOU MAY LIKE IT . . .

● **THE DIVORCE OF LADY X**; United Artists release of Alexander Korda production; directed by Tim Whelan; screen play by Robert Sherwood. Cast: Merle Oberon, Laurence Olivier, Binnie Barnes, Ralph Richardson, Morton Selten.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

IT IS impossible to give a very definite evaluation of an English film when writing for American readers. So much of the appeal of such pictures, sometimes most of it, is dependent upon one's appreciation of the English civilization. Personally, I find English speech delightful, and I am intrigued no end by the points of view of His Majesty's subjects, their traditions and modes of behavior. But as a motion picture reviewer it is not in my province to tell others that they should be. Impressions of *The Divorce of Lady X* will vary, then, according to one's outlook on the English. I found it considerably more enter-

taining than the majority of films I see. If you do not, don't say I said you would. (But if you like it, say I said you would.)

Bedroom Situations Overplayed . . .

THE opening of the piece is not marked by any great originality, being a variation on the bedroom farce. Guests at a costume ball in a London hotel are advised to remain there for the night because of a dense fog that has gathered. Rooms are at a premium and a certain "modern" young lady solves her problem by persuading, or rather inveigling, a gentleman into giving her his bed and spending the night in an adjoining sitting room. The "delicate situations" are probably overplayed, especially considering that picture audiences have learned long ago that nothing very torrid ever takes place in bedroom predicaments. But come the next morning the show shifts onto a mistaken-identity theme, circumstance conspiring to make the young man believe that Lady X, with whom he has fallen in love, is a many-times-married heart-breaker and the defendant in a divorce case he is going to handle at the bar.

Boasts Fifteen-cent Words . . .

MOST of the charm of the picture comes from the debonair and sophisticated spirit in which the story is told. It has a bit of an Arthur Schnitzler flavor. There are long stretches of mature dialogue, which is sprinkled with some real fifteen-cent words. Most pictures do not get beyond the nickel variety. Director Tim Whelan has not tempoed the show as crisply as he might have, nor is the scenario always conducive to crisp action; but this is a characteristic of British films, our cousins across the sea being of a more leisurely temperament than we. The picture is in technicolor and I believe the color adds glitter and gayety to the yarn, despite that one or two shots are slightly fused. Merle Oberon is attractive and plays with the required piquancy, and Laurence Olivier, well-schooled actor, is a good foil for her. Binnie Barnes, Ralph Richardson and Morton Selten are all efficient troupers.

MORE RIDIN' AND SHOOTIN' . . .

● **GUN LAW**; RKO; produced by Bert Gilroy; directed by David Howard; story and screen play by Oliver Drake; musical director, Roy Webb; photographed by Joseph August, A.S.C.; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate art director, Lucius Croxton; recorded by Richard Van Hossen; edited by Frederic Knudtson. Cast: George O'Brien, Rita Oehmen, Ray Whitley, Paul Everton, Robert Gleckler, Ward Bond, Francis McDonald, Edward Pawley.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

FOR the whistle-and-stomp trade. Children and members of the great illiterati will probably find the opus very stimulating, but those who are too mentally mature to view life as consisting of unadulterated heroism and villainy, will consider the picture childish. Some Westerns have been made of late which, though adhering essentially to formula, possessed certain overtones—a depiction of the grandeur of the out-of-doors, or some wit in the situations,

or some vivid characterization—which gave the films an appeal for more discriminating spectators. *Gun Law* is not of this sort. Plot is the dominant element, to the exclusion of almost any other commentary. There are a couple of interpolations of song, but even they fit into the movement of the story. For all that, the story is interesting, judged as a piece of fictional machinery. The nicety with which the parts fit together and correlate, the ease and pace of the movement, indicate good mechanics. But the film is unimportant as screen entertainment because it has nothing to say.

Instructive for Little Boys . . .

GEORGE O'BRIEN brings as much conviction to the hero role as it could be made to possess. Doubtless for some it will be convincing. The swaggering but earnest O'Brien is likable, his physique is impressive, and I suppose he sets a good example for little boys and others who still need good examples set for them. I always think, too, that these Westerns have the advantage of instructing little boys as to what a lot of rats there are in the world. The best portion of the present film is that at the opening, in which a desperate criminal drinks "bad water" from a pool in the desert and goes to join his ancestors, his credentials being taken over by O'Brien, who stumbles upon him. Director David Howard has gotten a measure of starkness into this episode, and has told it with some imaginative touches. The screen play and original were both by Oliver Drake, which probably accounts for its good structure. Roy Webb has given a helpful musical background to several of the episodes, and Joseph August's photography is standard.

HARD HITTING MYSTERY . . .

● **THE LADY IN THE MORGUE:** Universal; producer, Irving Starr; director, Otis Garrett; screenplay: Eric Taylor and Robertson White; original novel, Jonathan Latimer; photography, Stanley Cortez. The players: Preston Foster, Patricia Ellis, Frank Jenks, Thomas Jackson, Gordon Elliott, Roland Drew, Barbara Pepper, Joseph Downing, James Robbins, Al Hill, Morgan Kerr, Don Brodie, Rollo Lloyd, Gordon Hart.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

THESE Universal Crime Club mysteries are the outstanding whudunits of the screen. I go for them, and in a big way. The last one I saw, *The Case of the Black Doll*, had me on my mental toes every minute of the going. But *Lady in the Morgue* moves so fast and with such absorbing interest that I did not even have time to stay on my toes. First a word about the work of Director Otis Garrett, whose direction reminds me of Alfred Hitchcock, foremost director of thrillers of the screen. Director Garrett tells his story with snap and by subtle suggestions that keep his audience in a constant whirl. He moves rapidly, and the experience of watching this picture is very much like that of reading a hard-biting, socko Dashiell Hammett mystery. His quick wipes and dissolves are masterful, and for this a word of credit to film editor Ted Kent, who no doubt had much

to do with the movement of the story. The problem of the editor's importance to a final picture is a moot question at all times. I think, however, in the present instance the quality of the editor's work makes itself felt.

Hooray for Universal! . . .

THREE cheers for Universal. They have the courage to give outstanding parts in their picture to new names and faces. Nor is there the slightest air of amateurism about the film. The direction is smooth and the acting experienced. Gordon Elliott is someone new to me, and a player whose work is commendable. I should like to see him again. Joseph Downing and James Robbins, as two murder and kidnap suspects, are outstanding in their work, too. And a long yell for Don Brodie as a philosophical taxi driver. Of course, the principals do their work well. Preston Foster has never been better. Frank Jenks is excellent as his assistant. Thomas Jackson gives a convincing performance as a tough inspector. Patricia Ellis does fine work as another of the murder suspects. Preston Foster moved through his part with an ease that made his performance real. The natural touches, supplied along the line by Director Garrett, were well done and gave him a well rounded character.

Production Victory . . .

THE good direction and good casting is a reflection of the producer's work, Irving Starr. *Lady in the Morgue* is not a pretentious picture and did not have a high budget. Yet, the same care and attention seemed to be given it that is usually afforded a million dollar epic. Another quality of the picture that particularly appealed to me was its movement, something rarely found in current pictures. The present effort has a minimum of dialogue and a maximum of action, which is to the credit of Eric Taylor and

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Robertson White. The situations are amusing and fresh. The lines are crisp and give zest to the picture. The action seems to have been carefully worked out, and everything dovetails nicely at the end. There were no loose threads, another unusual happenstance in the case of whudunits. It is to be hoped that Preston Foster and Frank Jenks will be teamed in the further adventures of the snappiest detective since M-G-M put Nick Charles of *Thin Man* fame on a milktoast diet.

WASTED TALENTS ...

● **BLIND ALIBI**; RKO release of Cliff Reid production; director, Lew Landers; screenplay, Lionel Houser, Harry Segall, Ron Ferguson; original story, William Joyce Cowan; photography, Nicholas Musuraca; art director, Van Nest Polglase, assistant, Al Herman; film editor, Ted Cheesman. Cast: Richard Dix, Whitney Bourne, Eduardo Ciannelli, Frances Mercer, Paul Guilfoyle, Richard Lane, Jack Arnold, Walter Miller, Frank M. Thomas, Solly Ward, Tommy Bupp, George Irving and Ace, a dog.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

B *BLIND ALIBI* has everything a motion picture is supposed to have except a story. Although the film should not essentially depend on narrative continuity to tell a story, but should rely on the continuity of camera shots, there should be a minimum of story telling. *Blind Alibi* seems to be one of those films which began in story conference as an idea and blossomed forth on the screen as a picture. Given the "seeing eye" of a well trained police dog as a basis, the writers concocted a number of unreal and implausible situations to make the basis palatable. I imagine that in this conference someone must have asked, "Yeah! But how are you going to make a blind man the hero of a picture?" The answer was immediately forthcoming. "But he is not really blind. He is only posing as a blind man." "Gee, I see. Crooks and cops and the papers, and shooting. What a natural!"

Cast Is Good ...

AND thus an idea was born. Screen writers Lionel Houser, Harry Segall and Ron Ferguson must have labored mightily to bring forth this mouse. As it stands, the spectator has no interest in the leading characters, the situation or the outcome. The possibility that Ace, the seeing eye, might go blind did move me. Richard Dix is wasted in a part that made no demands on his dramatic talent. He is a reliable actor, but cannot deliver when there is nothing for him to use for delivery. Whitney Bourne mouthed her words so that understanding her was a trifle difficult. I believe it was the rapidity with which she spoke that made this difficulty evident. She, too, has done and can do better things, but the confines of her role, demanding nothing but the ability to stand in front of a camera and speak, hampered her. Eduardo Ciannelli is always a joy to behold; and RKO has yet to burden him with a role in which he does not shine. His menacing voice and attitude are forcefully brought to play, and he becomes my favorite screen heavy. However, within

the recent past he has been typed in one kind of role. His talents have a greater latitude than the producing minds which hire him will allow.

Others Who Are Wasted ...

PAUL GUILFOYLE has been a screen crook in the service of RKO so long that even Police Chief Davis wants to investigate him. I have a sneaking suspicion that this young man can really act, given the right kind of role. The same goes for Frank M. Thomas, who has now worn the same policeman's uniform for the last half dozen pictures. *Blind Alibi* is the kind of picture that keeps people out of the theatre. It is a pity that a director as fine as Lew Landers is forced to work with a script with such a lack of production and dramatic values. Without work of his calibre the story might have lacked what little interest is present.

BUYING GUIDE

(Continued from page 9)

it is not convincing. Well directed by Frank McDonald, it is a prison story with heart interest in it. Great performance by John Litel. Dick Foran fine in hero role, and reveals himself as a singer who knows how to sing. Running time, 67 minutes.

WORLD

★ **LIFE AND LOVES OF BEETHOVEN** (9)—A great musical-film that can be shown anywhere. Tie in with clubs and musical groups and promote the picture as educational. Although there is little action and the dialogue is in French (English subtitles) the film has universal appeal by virtue of the great music. An outstanding picture that can hold up anywhere.



Musical Score

"Vivacious Lady"

by

ROY WEBB

R. K. O.



MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

IN THE *Los Angeles Times* of April 24 there appeared a photograph and story regarding a remarkable invention. The picture was one of W. F. Alden, of Altadena, who says he has found "the fulcrum which may enable orators to move the earth with their voices." With sound from a phonograph he lifted a pound weight an inch within one minute. Mr. Alden is quite behind the times. If the Warner Brothers Hollywood Theatre were not so solidly steel-and-concrete anchored at Hollywood Boulevard, it could have been lifted to the top of Mount Baldy in the short time of the title preceding a picture called *Crime School*. The sound again was powerful enough the other night in the Alexander Theatre at Glendale, to send this building into outer space had afore-mentioned inventor Alden been handy with his electrical transformer. I can agree that previews should commence with fanfares, but why this infernal blare and noise of orchestra music, the yelling of spoken lines, stentorian booming of sung numbers? No radio or phonograph salesman would blast at a prospective customer when demonstrating an instrument. It is a situation worse than annoying. It makes it impossible to judge quality of sound. The public is neither deaf nor dumb, but it may become both as a result of the brutal racket to which patrons are subjected. Why not test public opinion fairly and thoroughly by way of report cards, if the various executives in charge are afraid to trust their own ears or those of the reviewers?

Momentous Implication...

I WENT to Warner's *Crime School* preview with all the more expectation, because Max Steiner's name had been given on the advance notice in connection with the music for the film. As can be gathered from the foregoing, the noise was terrific, especially at the start. I do not wish to discuss the story of the picture, but it provided little opportunity for music and the exceptional talent and skill of a Steiner seemed wasted on the subject and situation. Nevertheless he managed effects of music psychological character which are definitely worth mention. For instance, the dully smashing chord when one of the young gangsters slugs the pawnbroker. A dull crash, with lurid lightnings of sound flashing out of it. The crash sound continues to hang in the air—(presumably sustained with a big gong)—and hovers and spreads like the surprise, fear, panic, even horror and suspense, which grip the group of hooligans, rooted into rigidity. Then the contrasting effect of scurry. This is dramatically momentous sound because of what it implies.

Wasted Musicianship...

ON THE whole the remainder of the *Crime School* score is the fruitless struggle of musicianship against obvious make-belief. The impudently ironic

tune heard when the young criminals go through their limbering up exercises, is clever and amusing, but for the rest, I had the feeling as if some one was trying to reproduce a soft-toned etching on the kind of fuzzy, coarse paper on which pulp-magazines of gory content are printed. The only other instance of music used by Steiner to reveal the crucial state of a brooding, agitated and susceptible mind is the episode in which a young criminal hears the voices of gossip and insinuation regarding his sister. He has been thinking over this gossip until he seems to hear the actual remarks, lashing at him, driving him into action. Steiner resorts here to high-rising violin tremolos and stabbing thematic figures in a swelling, yet never loud crescendo, suggesting the inner dynamic of the boys. He and the audience hear these high, unreal, yet vicious sounding remarks, travelling on a cloud of violin sound.

Gay But Not Garish...

IT IS an old truth that good serious music is relatively easier to compose than a light but good score. For that very reason congratulations are due RKO's Roy Webb, the musical author, and orchestrator Russell Bennett, apropos of *Vivacious Lady*. The music is delightfully gay and never garish. It sparkles with the story and with the leading lady, Ginger Rogers. It is tender, genuinely affectionate, not merely sweet in the common meaning of this much misused word. In fact, Webb has written a truly expressive little love theme, charmingly simple, and so direct that Bennett could make it almost "act" in tender, clinging orchestral gestures. There is also a fancy night club song with a bit of pleasing sentimentality, borne out, or dramatically justified, by the nature of the singer in the film play. It is an extraordinarily consistent song considering it has three parents, George Jessel, Jack Meskill and Ted Shapiro. General vocal arrangements by Roger Edens, too, are effective. Musical Director Dave Dreyer has seen to it that the work of his staff is never more amusing or more serious than the situations, but it always adds a sheen and impetus to whatever situation. In short, here is exemplary comedy music, in good taste, piquant, preserving yet not changing the

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flavor. It frames, but does not infringe upon the picture.

Silence Is Golden...

COMPOSER-DIRECTOR Charles Previn has materially aided the artistic efforts of Universal in the last two years. Stokowski relied greatly on him during the making of *One Hundred Men and a Girl*. Previn is a musician of discretion, and therefore was wise in venturing hardly beyond the gates of Universal's *Paradise for Sinners*. He preferred the virtue of self-effacing silence, and I am not sarcastic. If there be a paradise for sinners, then it must be different from what Universal showed. I think Charlie Previn did a rather arch thing; he waited for a better paradise. Nor can I speak more than in passing about a score by Shostakovitch for a Soviet-minded film, *Alone*. The picture music is typical of his ingenuity, although I think that naivety and simplicity can be carried too far, a tendency shown by this famous musician as in his symphonic works. The use of percussion instruments of the Chinese theatre type was interesting at first, but grew wearisome in the course of repetition. It is part of a stage technic which is applied, hardly logically always, to this film. Unfortunately the sound apparatus functioned so poorly that I speak only with due reservations.

Going Round and Round...

DMITRI TIOMKIN is working on the score for *Spawn of the North*, directed by Henry Hatha-

way at Paramount. The music will be based in part on Alaskan Indian tribal tunes, especially the sequences dealing with tribal dances and episodes featuring the aborigines. I hear on good authority that Jerome Kern has been asked to write music for another score. Incidentally, he has completed his stage operetta, *Gentlemen Unafraid*, which opens June 3 at St. Louis. It has also been booked for an early Autumn showing on Broadway. Oscar Hammerstein II and Otto Harbach have furnished book and lyrics, Russell Bennett wrote the score and orchestrations, but had to have assistance on the latter, as he is busy at RKO. Bennett is president of ASMA which in full means American Society of Musical Arrangers. A TNT Cocktail, mixed by Robert Russell Bennett, introduced by way of a fanfare at the world's fair preview music festival, was just held in New York City under the directorship of Olin Downes, music editor of *New York Times*. On that occasion a fifteen-minute medley from Kern's *Show Boat* was played, especially arranged by Bennett for a band of sixty-five players.... Ernest Toch, of 20th Century-Fox music department, has been commissioned by Mrs. F. S. Coolidge to compose a piano quintet for the Pittsfield, (Mass.), chamber music festival. The festival is held in celebration of the 20th anniversary of chamber-music concerts sponsored by Mrs. Coolidge throughout the country.

"VIVACIOUS LADY"

A

George Stevens

PRODUCTION

FOR

R. K. O. — RADIO

GINGER ROGERS

“Vivacious Lady”

(R. K. O.)

JAMES STEWART

“Vivacious Lady”

(R. K. O.)

Hollywood

10 CENTS

SPECTATOR

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—May 21, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 6

Call Out The Old Guard!

In the Present Box-Office Crisis it Might
Help if People Trained in Silent
Days Were Called in to Apply
Microphone Intelligently



Bruno Ussher Discusses Musical Scores
From the Standpoint of the Box-Office



COCOANUT GROVE ★ THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO ★ GOLD DIGGERS IN PARIS

NEW ADVENTURES OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

ONLY PUBLICATION IN THE WORLD DEVOTED
EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM

Are You Doing Your Full Share?

Since the reorganization of the Motion Picture Relief Fund, the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee are composed of members of the Screen Directors, Writers, and Actors' Guilds, together with Producers and representatives of the Make-up Artists, Film Editors, Publicity Group, and Art Directors.

It is the hope of all that through hard, unselfish work and efficient management this great organization which belongs to the entire industry may be able to function one hundred per cent in relieving the distress of our less fortunate brothers and sisters.

JEAN HERSHOLT, President

RALPH MORGAN, Chairman
Executive Committee



From the

EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

Call Out the Old Guard . . .

RECENTLY Daily Variety had this to say: "Rapidly declining picture grosses, in some instances reaching forty to fifty per cent below all-time depression day lows, have exhibitors here and elsewhere jittery and frantically trying to devise ways and means to combat the serious situation which has developed."

Everything which has happened to pictures in the last decade was predicted by the Spectator long in advance of its happening. That is a matter of record. The predictions were not mere guesses. They were based on reasoning from the standpoint of film facts.

ANYONE with even elemental knowledge of people, pictures, and sound business principles, could see that the film industry was riding to a fall. The Spectator saw it and warned of it so repeatedly that it grew tired of the repetition. In several issues of recent dates it analysed the business situation of the industry and suggested methods by which it could be made more stable.

Only the inherent strength of the screen as a medium of entertainment has enabled it to survive the grossly ignorant management it has received, but, as Variety indicates, its resistance is waning, its situation becoming desperate.

Jittery exhibitors can do nothing about it. The remedy must be applied at the source of the trouble—the picture producing plants in Hollywood.

IMPROVMENT in general business conditions will have but a temporary revivifying effect on box-office grosses. When the depression of the early thirties was at its height, the Spectator made the same statement and later events have proven its soundness.

We repeat what we have said scores of times—that there is not a controlling producer in a Hollywood studio who has the remotest concep-

tion of what a real motion picture is—that if the automobile industry were in such ignorant hands no car would keep running for a thousand miles.

Yet to make a good box-office picture is a simple process, but not a process so simple that simpletons can apply it. Knowledge of the fundamentals of the medium is essential.

PICTURE ignorance has had its day. Knowledge must supplant it if conditions are to be improved. In schools and colleges all over the country there are students who know more about the fundamentals of screen entertainment than is known by the producers who control the output of Hollywood studios. The Spectator, which is used as a textbook for hundreds of these Motion Picture Appreciation classes, is playing its part in spreading picture knowledge, but exhibitors can not wait for the students to grow up and take command.

THE present producers must apply the remedy, must give the business financial stability. That means they must acquire knowledge of the business they are in. As a starting point I would suggest their reading of the Spectators of April twenty-three, April thirty, May seven. That at least should start them thinking.

If studio executives would think less of horse races and more of their jobs, less of sporting events and more of the nature of their business, a few among them might devise ways to cope with the present crisis. The intelligent ones might profit by remembering that in the silent days the picture business was a rather steady one, that its very steadiness led to its downfall before the microphone came along to revive it.

TURNING out box-office successes in the silent days became such a routine matter that executives grew careless and gave little thought to their product. Box-offices reflected the carelessness, and while the executives sat around

and blinked at one another in complete ignorance of the reason for what was happening to the film industry, the sound device came along and with its advent they ceased thinking entirely, and since then have not thought in terms of the business they are in.

What Hollywood needs now is what it needed but did not get when talking pictures first were made possible—the application of the new element in a manner to strengthen a form of entertainment which already had proven its power to build a gigantic industry. Instead of proceeding in that manner, Hollywood chucked its old business overboard and went into a new one. It now is paying the price of its ignorance and will continue to pay it until intelligence supplants the ignorance.

THERE are available some Hollywood brains which retain knowledge gained in making silent pictures. It is not too late yet to relegate the microphone to its proper place as a medium of expression, to tell stories more with the camera than with sound machinery. If a producer with long experience in the silent era—Ben Schulberg, for instance—were to be called back into service, he could make the kind of pictures exhibitors need to restore prosperity to their business.

EVENTS have proven that straight talking pictures will not hold the audience the industry needs for its support. Silent pictures did. Then what we want are producers who know how to make silent pictures and are sufficiently familiar with the microphone to use it to make their talkies even better box-office than the silent pictures used to be. Ben Schulberg comes to mind because of his long service before sound came and his subsequent experience with it.

The sound device came as a great boon to the screen. It has been used as a weapon which has been battering the life out of it.

Ignorance has had its day!

It is time to call out the Old Guard!

* * *

DOUGS, SENIOR AND JUNIOR . . .

ONE of the wisest screen stars I know is Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. When I met him first about twenty years ago, he assured me he was not an actor, that all he knew was how to leap over things and climb ivy-clad walls, and that when he grew too old to do that he was going to quit. And that is what Doug has done. Not for him was the des-

perate hanging on to fading glory. As his screen performances so largely engaged only his body, he occupied his head with thoughts of business with the result that when he withdrew from public gaze, his pockets were well stuffed with money and to Doug, Jr., he left the perpetuation of the name. Only one complete Fairbanks has a place in screen history, the father figuring from the neck down and the son from the neck up. It will not be long until young Doug is recognized as one of the really brilliant screen actors.

* * *

WE REPLY TO A CORRESPONDENT . . .

A CORRESPONDENT takes me to task for referring in the last *Spectator* to Shirley Temple as still "at the head of the box-office list," while the figures compiled by *National Box-Office Digest* and published in its annual number showed Shirley's place to be in the twenties. I have no quarrel with the *Digest's* figures or its way of figuring, but before we can accept its box-office ratings as reflecting the true standing of players, we must take into consideration the manner in which they are arrived at. The range of *Digest's* compilations necessarily must be limited to the box-office figures available to it, and those available, while considerable, are by no means sufficiently comprehensive to reflect the true standing of players throughout the world. The great majority of picture houses do not report their box-office earnings, the smaller houses, which outnumber the big ones perhaps one hundred to one, not making box-office reports which can be used in establishing ratings. *Digest* gets what figures it can and rates the players accordingly. Those who during the period it covers happened to be lucky enough to appear in pictures which did big business in key city houses which make public their box-office takes, of necessity must get top rating in *Digest's* list.

Rating Star Popularity . . .

THE price of admission also is a factor in rating the popularity of players. If one person pays sixty cents to see Player A on the screen of a city house, and three people pay fifteen cents each to see Player B in a village theatre, the gross intake would place A's popularity over B's in the ratio of sixty to forty-five; but is not a player whom three people pay to see, more popular than another whom only one person pays to see? In any event, the sixty cents return is made public and the forty-five cents return is not, which places B in the position of getting no credit for drawing three customers while A was drawing one. And another factor we must take into account is that a thousand-dollar-week in the majority of houses is much greater than a sixty-thousand-dollar-week in the Radio City Music Hall. Only by an answer from the majority of big and little exhibitors to one question can the true box-office rating of players be established: "Which star do your patrons like most?" That removes the hazard of figures. If box-office earnings be the only guide, Joe Doakes, in a supporting role in a picture which turns out to be a tre-

mendous success, could get higher rating than Gary Cooper if he happened to be in one which flopped.

Herald's Approach Has Merit . . .

THE nearest approach to a really accurate estimate of the box-office strength of players is that compiled each year by *Motion Picture Herald*. The *Herald's* conclusions are not based on box-office grosses; its question is one which exhibitors have latitude in answering and which has the additional advantage of being one which all of them can answer accurately: "What ten players drew the greatest number of patrons to your theatre?" We get the answer to that in people, not in dollars, and without doubt the answer is influenced as much by the patrons' liking for a given player as by the earnings of the players' pictures. For three years Shirley Temple has headed the *Herald's* list of box-office stars, winning last year by a wide margin, and to lend strength to the soundness of my method of reasoning is the fact that Shirley did not appear in *Film Daily's* list of the ten best box-office pictures of the year. And without adding up box-office figures or summarizing exhibitor's lists of favorites, but by approaching the matter as a purely mental problem, we cannot escape the conclusion that Shirley Temple must be the filmdom's best box-office bet. She is the greatest actress on the screen and is the only player of either sex who has universal appeal, who can delight both the youngest children and their grandparents, and all the ages which come between. If the correspondent to whom I referred at the opening of these remarks, challenges the accuracy of that conclusion, will he please tell me what other player has appeal as universal as that of Shirley? The only thing which jeopardizes her standing at the head of the box-office list for years to come, is Darryl Zanuck's lack of knowledge of what to do to keep her there. She has got where she is in spite of him—not by virtue of his understanding of the kind of pictures in which she should appear.

* * *

LESLIE HOWARD SPEAKING . . .

OVER in London Leslie Howard is having things to say about motion pictures. Among the interesting things he said for publication in *Film Weekly*, one of England's most enterprising and entertaining picture publications, we find the following: "Let it be understood from the beginning that films attract me more than anything else on earth—more than writing, painting or even the theatre. Were I not so attracted by them I should have got out of the racket years ago, and most certainly shouldn't, at the moment, be considering putting back into various British film projects much of the money which I have earned starring in pictures. Films are the most fascinating form of expression on earth. Their potentialities are limitless. What troubles me is to see this young industry corrupted by big business and held

in check by its own bogus artistic standards. I think you will agree that anyone genuinely interested in the rational development of the film industry can scarcely be blamed for taking every opportunity of exposing its follies. . . . An actor will only achieve worthwhile results when he forgets his own ego and realizes that he is merely a cog in a machine—of no more importance than the director, the scenarist, cameraman or lighting expert. The film industry makes it very difficult for even its genuine actors to approach their work in the right spirit. The adulation which is extended to anyone who appears in pictures tends to puff them up with big ideas of their own importance. Publicity sheets shriek one's capabilities and gifts to the skies until one almost believes them."

* * *

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

A HUGE bumble bee, a Zeppelin of his species, is zooming among the locust blossoms just above my head. . . . Sometime ago I wrote of a plant in the flower garden which I had tended carefully, named Throgmorton, and which had turned out to be a weed; I libeled Throgmorton; he has turned out to be a bush of celery. . . . It does not take me long to read the daily papers as I skip all the unpleasant stories they carry. . . . I have put one over on the sun; there are three identical chairs on the lawn; one of them is in the sun when I start my three hours of daily writing—this morning at 7:15—when the sun gets too hot, I move to the semi-shade of chair number two, and when I begin to blister there I seek the complete shade provided by number three. . . . Gene Autry thanked me for a review I had given one of his pictures; told me the president of Sears-Roebuck had mailed him from Chicago the *Spectator* containing it; you can get from Sears-Roebuck practically anything you want. . . . As far as I know I am the only man in the world growing Throgmorton celery. . . . Jimmie Fidler, with whose radio broadcasts I quarrel quite frequently, gave me the name of his shirtmaker, a woman who also makes slacks, and as soon as I can afford it I will become one of her customers and vie with Jimmie in natiness. . . . A neighbor's cat made use of one of our outbuildings and presented us with a litter of kittens, much to the amazement of the Spaniel and the Peke; one of the litter we will keep in payment for board and lodging for the lot; we have named ours Percival. . . . A neighbor just phoned that from her front porch she could see the Peke having a fit in our driveway; I rushed out and found her, her four paws in the air, luxuriously scratching her back on the gravel. . . . I have decided that no part of Throgmorton will be eaten; am curious to see what happens to a celery bush when it is left in undisturbed possession of life and limb.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

SOMEWHAT BETTER THAN MOST . . .

● **COCOANUT GROVE**; Paramount; producer, George M. Arthur; director, Alfred Santell; assistant director, Roland Asher; original story and screen play by Sy Bartlett and Olive Cooper; photographed by Leo Tover, A.S.C.; art direction by Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; edited by Hugh Bennett; sound recording, Harry Mills and Don Johnson; interior decorations by A. E. Freudeman; costumes, Edith Head; musical direction, Boris Morros; musical advisor, Arthur Franklin. Cast: Fred MacMurray, Harriet Hilliard, The Yacht Club Boys, Ben Blue, Eve Arden, Billy Lee, Rufe Davis, Harry Owens, Dorothy Howe, George Walcott, Red Stanley, Roy Gordon.

SOMEWHAT more entertaining than others of the sort but not so much so that it will give the box-office the shot in the arm it needs so badly. Producers cannot go on indefinitely doing the same thing over and over again and hope to hold the interest of the paying customers. If *Cocoanut Grove* were the first musical comedy film to appear on any screen, it would be a sensational success and would be a milestone in screen history. It has to its credit many things of outstanding merit, excellent music, clever comedy and a very fine production, but we have seen so many of which this one is but a variation, that we view it with a "Well, what of it?" feeling. It was not shown the press to the best advantage, the sound equipment in the Ambassador Hotel Theatre being unequal to the task of doing justice to either dialogue or score. The comfortable seats in the back of the house where the sound would be less irritating were reserved for Paramount studio people and their friends, and the reviewers, whose opinions mean so much to exhibitors showing the picture, were herded down front to sit in hard seats and get the full blast from the screen. Even feeding the reviewers in the Grove after the preview could not get the noise out of their minds.

Why Girl Leaves Boy . . .

WERE my problem at the moment one of telling you my reaction to the film at the time of viewing it. I would state that I did not enjoy it, but given a comfortable seat in a house with good sound equipment, I think you would derive considerable entertainment from it if you still have a taste for pictures of its class. The story is a frail one which could not happen, but that is not a demerit. It provides places for musical and comedy interpolations which will please you. The inevitable romance is of standard variety. Boy meets girl, they fall in love, girl gets mad at boy, walks out, he chases her, brings her back—clinch. The girl's reason for getting mad is a tremendous one—she sees him speaking to another girl. An awful thing like that is enough to wreck any romance. The rest of the story gives a semblance of logic to the inclusion of the specialty numbers, and for that credit goes to the writers, Sy Bartlett and Olive Cooper. Alfred Santell's direction keeps things moving at a brisk pace, but I wish he had been able to make some of his players pipe down

when reading lines. In several scenes it is made obvious that we are listening to actors spouting dialogue and not to members of an orchestra discussing their hard luck. At times the vocal din is terrific.

Cast a Capable One . . .

THE cast gives satisfaction. Fred MacMurray is raised to star status in the opening title, and his musical attainments coupled with his easy and convincing acting technique prove his right to such distinction. Harriet Hilliard was an ideal choice as the other half of the romance and contributed a great deal to the entertainment the picture will provide. The Yacht Club Boys appear to better advantage than ever before. I always have liked them. To my way of thinking Ben Blue is one of the cleverest comedians on the screen. Teamed here with Eve Arden, he is responsible for many laughs, but not as many as would have come his way without her valuable assistance. Billy Lee, child actor, scores something in the nature of a triumph with his expert drumming. George Walcott plays convincingly a heavy role, Red Stanley proves adroit as a comedian, and Harry Owens shows he can act as well as lead an orchestra. Rufe Davis, Dorothy Howe and Roy Gordon round out the capable cast. Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick designed a highly impressive production and Leo Tover made a good job of the photography.

LIFE IN THE OLD BODY . . .

● **THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO**; a Reliance picture; released through United Artists; produced by Edward Small; directed by Rowland V. Lee; story by Alexandre Dumas; screen play and dialogue by Philip Dunn, Dan Tothoroh and Rowland V. Lee; photographed by Peverell Marley. Cast: Robert Donat, Elissa Landi, Louis Calhern, Sidney Blackmer, Raymond Walburn, O. P. Heggie, Georgia Caine, Walter Walker, Lawrence Grant, Luis Alberni, Irene Hervey, Douglas Walton, Juliette Compton, Clarence Wilson, Eleanor Phelps, Ferdinand Munier, Holmes Herbert, Paul Irving, Mitchell Lewis, Clarence Muse, Lionel Belmore, Wilfred Lucas, Tom Rickette, Edward Keane, Sydney Jarvis, Desmond Roberts, Alphonse Martell, Russell Powell, Wallace Albright, William Farnum.

WHEN this picture was previewed in the fall of 1934 I enjoyed it as entertainment and in my review praised it highly. When I viewed it last week I enjoyed it more than I did the first time. It is a stirring, well made drama of revenge, with story appeal to our elemental emotions and fashioned after the dramatic pattern which has pleased audiences since the theatre was born—the hero emerges tri-

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umphantly and the villains get theirs, good and plenty. But it is not a slap-dash melodrama; it is a polite affair, dressed with magnificence, has a cast of distinction, was directed brilliantly. Technically, it shows its age a little, comparison with present pictures indicating the advance that has been made in lighting and the quality of film. But that is something only for Hollywood to note; what counts more is that *The Count of Monte Cristo* will stir the emotions of today's audiences as powerfully as it did those of yesterday.

Lee's Direction Masterly . . .

ONE thing I was interested in noting was that Rowland Lee, the director, four years ago had a more intelligent grasp of the manner in which dialogue should be recorded than the majority of directors have now. His people speak in tones to match the mood of scenes and there is loud talking only when the scenes demand it. The picture is a big one, mounted on a huge scale and having many elaborate sets, but Lee never permits the story to lose itself in its pictorial grandeur. It took expert direction to preserve intact the thread of a narrative with so many ramifications, one which is composed of three separate wrongs to be avenged and a romance which spans the score of years the action covers; but Lee never permits it to become involved or hard to follow. In a masterly way he builds suspense until it grips the audience and keeps it tense. We have been taught to know the hero always emerges triumphantly, but that does not lessen our apprehension for his safety when he is facing great odds or permit us to breathe easily until he is out of danger.

Old Favorites In Cast . . .

THERE apparently is no reason why the box-office should not demonstrate the wisdom of the re-issue of this success of four years ago. Its appeal is fundamental, as fresh today as when the picture was made. Many of those who saw it when it first was shown will want to see it again, and each of the passing years has created a new audience which has not seen it. In the cast are players whom old audiences will be glad to see again, who would be seen more frequently if our producers had more intelligence. Pleasant memories are evoked by the presence in the cast of Georgia Caine, O. P. Heggie, Lawrence Grant, Holmes Herbert, Mitchell Lewis, Clarence Muse, Lionel Belmore, Wilfred Lucas, Tom Rickette, Alphonse Martell and William Farnum. The late O. P. Heggie's performance is a beautiful bit of work. Donat's performance will rate, I believe, as the greatest he has given the screen. As the three villains, Louis Calhern, Sidney Blackmer and Raymond Walburn are impressive. I was interested in the appearance of Irene Hervey who shares a romance with Douglas Walton. The charm of her personality, the sweetness and innocence of youth, contribute a nice touch. Edward Small, producer of the picture, made a great job of a great story. I hope his re-issue will be so successful that we will be shown

again some of the productions which now are but pleasant screen memories.

IS NICE IN SPOTS . . .

● **GOLD DIGGERS IN PARIS;** Warners picture and release; executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Sam Bischoff; screen play by Earl Baldwin and Warren Duff; story by Jerry Wald, Richard Macaulay and Maurice Leo; from an idea by Jerry Horwin and James Seymour; directed by Ray Enright; dialogue director, Gene Lewis; musical numbers created and directed by Busby Berkeley; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; photography by Sol Polito; musical numbers photographed by George Barnes; music and lyrics by Harry Warren, Al Dubin and Johnny Mercer; assistant director, Jesse Hibbs; film editor, George Amy; sound by C. A. Riggs and David Forrest; art director, Robert Haas; gowns by Howard Shoup; orchestral arrangements by Ray Heindorf. Cast: Rudy Vallee, Rosemary Lane, Hugh Herbert, Allen Jenkins, Gloria Dickson, Melville Cooper, Mabel Todd, Fritz Feld, Ed Brophy, Curt Bois, Victor Kilian, George Renevent, Armand Kaliz, Maurice Cass, Eddie Anderson, Rosella Towne, Janet Shaw, Carole Landis, Peggy Moran, Diana Lewis, Lois Lindsay, Poppy Wilde and the Schnickelfritz band.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

IF ONLY there were a stage in the production of screen musicals comparable to the Atlantic City period of stage productions, where unsatisfactory bits could be taken out and stronger material substituted, and the whole given a careful polish, many film musicals which now reach the screen as so-so productions might be primped into something exceptional. But, alas, as I have pointed out before, the screen has no such stage in its production process. Some pruning and polishing can be done after previews, especially when budgets allow for a few retakes, but, by and large, things have to be right the first time. *Gold Diggers In Paris* is a smart show in many ways. It has numerous touches of originality and wit, good pace, a measure of glitter, and it reflects expert direction. But for all that, there are stretches of the film comprised of such fustian, and the story itself is such a propped-up thing, that the musical can scarcely be rated as an outstanding film.

Direction Is Imaginative . . .

RAY ENRIGHT has directed the picture with a good deal of imagination. The action is rapid, the characters are sharply drawn, their movements varied and sure and their comedy lines well timed and punctuated. A commendable feature of Enright's direction is the fine variety with which he uses the camera. One of Rudy Vallee's numbers is caught with a tilting shot, the singer moving along the railing of a ship, above the camera—really quite effective. "Pans," "dollies," "booms," and other shots

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are generously employed by Enright. In fact, as I recall, he always endeavors to translate his story into visual action when he can, but the story material is based on the convention of stage musicals, whereby one group talks, then another group talks, and then somebody sings or dances. But it is all done on a fine scale, Samuel Bischoff ably demonstrating his skill as a producer and Busby Berkeley contributing some of the dance ensembles for which he is noted.

Writers Generously Used . . .

FROM the inception of the story idea to the screen play version, seven writing gentlemen had a hand in the opus, so it is rather remarkable that the opus has as much coherency and sense as it has. The plot has to do with a nitwit Frenchman's being commissioned by directors of the Paris Exposition to come to America and sign the American Academy Ballet to take part in a dancing contest with representatives of other nations at the exposition. The Frenchman signs a contract with the managers of the almost-bankrupt Club Bali, confusing it with the ballet organization, "as might be expected," so the publicity department synopsis strategically assures one. In Paris the night-clubbers are exposed and sought by the police, but worm their way out of the dilemma and win the dance prize after all. The anemic yarn is kept on its feet and moving only through large injections of coincidence, and by much pushing and pulling on the part of director and cast. The finale, which wins the prize, is not a ballet at all, but a conventional song and dance number. Ridiculed as hyper-aesthetic loons are the real ballet group, especially its star. No one longer looks to the present crop of picture moguls to do much to raise the level of mass culture, but they might at least refrain from ridiculing cultural institutions.

Crooner Croons Agreeably . . .

RUDY VALLEE is altogether acceptable as a film-musical lead man. His diction and his speaking voice are pleasant, he has poise, and in some shots he is indeed a handsome fellow. As a singer, his work is quite agreeable, if one forgets momentarily about Caruso. In his role he lacks pliancy, but this shortcoming is partly made up for by some impersonations he gives, one of Chevalier, the other of our own Franklin Roosevelt, the latter coming as a surprise and quite tickling the preview audience. Vallee has a decided flair for this sort of thing. Rosemary Lane came through with a creditable performance and sings pleasantly. Hugh Herbert, the "Wu! Wu!" man, is in good Wu-Wuing form, and Gloria Dickson is clever, especially in her subtle moments, before she is required to scream so much. Allen Jenkins, Melville Cooper, Mabel Todd, Fritz Feld, Curt Bois were other outstanding players. A talking dog, made articulate through ventriloquism, was a good gag and could have been played up more.

We Are Deafened . . .

A MISTAKE in showmanship was the featuring of the six-piece Schnickelfritz Band, which I am informed Vallee discovered in a Mid-Western night

club. They may be great stuff in a night club, but they are a total loss on the screen, featuring as they do almost pure, unmitigated noise. The publicity bulletin boasts that they used 78 different "instruments," including auto sirens, train whistles, old automobile rims and conch shells. The effect was made all the more aggravating by the man at the Warner's Theatre sound panel, who stepped up the noise until it was nearly agonizing. At one sudden blast I flinched and let out a mild curse, which caused the man at my side, maybe the studio sound man, to eye me with disapproval; and I eyed him back with reciprocal disapproval; and all the time the blasts kept flaying us. I bet when the Schnickelfritz Band is heard through the country there will be a new outburst of strikes and wife beatings. In fact, I wouldn't doubt at all that the enervating effects of abused sound apparatus has a good deal to do with world chaos. At any rate, such noise as this is driving people from picture theatres. The choral effects in the film were almost as deafening.

White Dots This Time . . .

OF THE music, *Day-Dreaming*, by Harry Warren and Johnny Mercer struck my fancy most forcibly. The other tunes, by Warren and Dubin, are sufficiently tuneful, some having catchy lyrics. Leo F. Forbstein has handled the the orchestral effects with his customary thorough musicianship. A praiseworthy feature of the picture is that it has background music for large portions of the action. Some process shots are well handled, particularly scenes with lighted fountains glowing behind the players. Sol Polito did the general photography, with George Barnes filming the musical numbers, which were made more interesting by unusual camera angles. After the picture was completed, at a cost of several hundred thousand dollars, someone was authorized to put big, distracting white dots onto the film, so that men in the projection booths could know when to change reels. The white dots are even more noticeable than the usual dark ones. Of all the inanities of our loony town, this practice of marring valuable film is one of the most incomprehensible.

ROVER BOYS IN REVOLUTION . . .

● **NEW ADVENTURES OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL:** a London film; director, Hans Schwartz; producer, Arnold Pressburger; story, Baroness Orczy; costumes, Rene Hubert. The cast: Barry Barnes, Sophie Stewart, Margaretta Scott, James Mason, Francis Lister, Anthony Bushell, Patrick Barr, David Tree, John Counsell.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

THE *New Adventures* of those deuced clever fellows, Scarlet Pimpernel and Alexander Korda, are unfortunately unworthy successors of the Leslie Howard triumph. Mr. Korda has not spared expense, and there are production values galore. There is more here on which to feast the eyes than *Lloyds of London* and the *House of Rothschild* combined. Nevertheless, the current adventures of the saviour of *la noblesse francaise* did not seem to ring true. His exploits, his disguises, his ruses and his hairbreadth

escapes did not have the finesse and the suspense present in the earlier picture. Baroness Orczy's story does not have the quality in this case that the first one did. And it seemed as if the characters raced through their parts in an attempt to bring the picture in on schedule.

Story Has No Soul...

NOT that the greatest care is not in evidence. For judging by the lavish costumes alone the picture must have cost a pretty Bank of England penny. But the story has no soul. Sir Percy Blakeny's return to France to save his wife, and inadvertently the lives of a few of the nobility, did not seem real. None of the characters seemed real. Least of all Robespierre, the tyrant of the celebrated French Terror. Francis Lister's Chauveline, head of the Secret Police, was too obviously villainous. The Tallien created by James Mason was historically inaccurate, if I remember my Carlyle. In the present instance he is depicted as a weak, vacillating young man, torn between the love of an actress and his duty as a guardian of liberty. Actually, he was quite a figure who finally ended the terror practically single-handed.

Pimpernel's Men...

THERE was never a feeling of imminent danger, ever present in the Leslie Howard version, this perhaps for the reason that the Pimpernel's men, aside from being in the right place at the right time for the right reason, seemed to be on an Eton schoolboy's holiday. Although danger was ever present, and death and the guillotine but a few yards away, they toasted His Majesty, the King, in the best light opera tradition. Their manifold disguises, and the ease with which they slipped through the fingers of their French pursuers made the story not a little unbelievable. There are several scenes in the picture which deserve the highest commendation. The handling of the Tribunal scene and the downfall of Robespierre was masterful. The Guillotine-Place de la Concorde sequences were also well handled, as was the Brighton cricket scene. There is pageant, indeed, but not the warmth and sincerity so needed to make a story of this kind real.

CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by
RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD
of
MABEL KEEFER

HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON says: "There is only one way to improve the taste of a nation. It cannot be done in a hurry and it cannot be done by force. It can only be accomplished by exposing the people patiently and systematically and continually to that which is truly 'good'—to that which is truly 'noble' in the sense that it deserves to be known. . . . Not that, in the matter of taste, we can expect everybody to like something merely because we say so. That is impossible and furthermore not necessary." Mr. van Loon then stresses the fact that exposing people "just as much as possible to that which is a true product of divine inspiration and honest human craftsmanship," often leads to their making a good choice for themselves, and because they have done so "out of their own volition, it will be a lasting one." In a recent *Spectator*, Bert Harlen, speaking of screen art, said: "No art medium in the past has offered so many properties which could be moulded into an artistic whole by the creative artist." And surely no medium in the past has offered such opportunity for "exposing the people" to the ideas and ideals that make for the progress of mankind, as that which the screen offers. The creative artist who uses this medium as a sounding board, as he plays upon the heartstrings of the world, is using an instrument of unlimited and unequalled power.

* * *

WONDER if in these times of stress, Dame Fortune might knock at my door, if of wishbone I had just a little bit less, and of backbone a great deal more?

* * *

HER JUNGLE LOVE is billed at one of our local theatres, but I have no desire to see it. However, I feel somewhat indebted to Paramount because I have been entertained by reading two reviews of the picture—that of Editor Beaton, in the *Spectator*, and Howard Barnes, in the *New York Herald Tribune*. I wore a broad grin while reading them—very broad in the case of the *Spectator*—and, as a grin pulls up the corners of one's mouth, automatically it becomes a beauty treatment; therefore my feeling of indebtedness to Paramount.

* * *

MISSED seeing *Stolen Heaven*. It was shown in this town before the *Spectator* carrying the preview arrived, and I knew nothing about the good music in the picture until a friend told me how fine it was. So, once more I ponder the enigma of motion picture advertising. The custom seems to be, ballyhoo about nothing, but when there really is something the public should be told about, silence reigns supreme. Might one be permitted to suggest to pro-

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ducers and exhibitors that this is not a case where silence is golden, nor is it silvern? It is just plain box-office minus.

* * *

MOST criticism of the film industry is, I think, the result of a desire to have screen art take its rightful place with the other great arts. And, because there have been truly great screen presentations, one criticises with a sort of "this hurts me more than it hurts you" feeling.

* * *

TWO most gratifying musical moments in the *Girl of the Golden West*: Jeanette MacDonald singing with the piccolo. (It was a piccolo, wasn't it? At times the tone quality sounded more like the lower voiced flute.) And Nelson Eddy humming, and strumming a guitar. We should have more of that sort of thing in musical pictures, and less concert work.

* * *

BERT HARLEN, of the *Spectator*, quoted Frank S. Nugent, of the *New York Times*, who quotes Will Hays (hope I can find my way back) as saying, in effect, that it is important to bring new customers to the motion picture theatre. That wouldn't mean that the film industry might do something to attract an entirely new type of theatre patron, would it? For instance, it wouldn't cut down its output of musical shorts depicting floor shows in night clubs, and substitute a few embodying artistic merit as to music, artists, directing, wit and humor—would it? Could it, by any chance, be brought to consider the suggestion that the majority of the very people it seeks to attract by the current type of musical short, are spending their evenings in night clubs where they get the dance bands and floor shows at first hand, and not at the motion picture theatres? And could it be persuaded to plan feature pictures and musical shorts that would complement each other for an evening's entertainment—doing away with the double-feature program? In short, would it be possible to convince the industry that it has made a mistake in neglecting a certain type of potential motion picture patron, and that it would be well—box-officially speaking—to do a little courting in that direction?

* * *

A FIVE-YEAR-OLD miss speaking: "It's not right to say 'ain't', is it? But it's all right to say 'isn't', ain't it?"

* * *

ONE of the most fragrant poems I have ever read is Helen Mitchel's *Inebriant*, which has to do with a lemon tree that, I assume, is in her yard. . . . And that gives me an idea! The next time I am handed a lemon, instead of making lemonade—this is, trying to—as I have been wont to do, I shall plant the seeds and have a lemon tree of my own—maybe.

* * *

THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE prints an excerpt from a letter written by one of its writers: "Every story I ever wrote for *The American* I promptly sold

for pictures. And every story I ever wrote directly for pictures I never sold to pictures, nor anybody. Do you suppose the movie boys like to lean a wee bit on your judgment, Mr. Editor?" What do you make of it, Watson? No, no! You are wrong! Nothing so simple as that! As a matter of fact, the answer is much too complicated for the average mind to grasp. Here we have on one hand—well, whatever it is we have on one hand, and on the other hand—are you following me, Watson? And one always must take into consideration the variables and—quite right, my dear Watson! As you say, we'd better have a spot of lunch before we go into this matter any further.

* * *

WISH I knew where I could get me some mirth—I could use plenty of it tonight. Unfortunately, the pictures being shown are either of the maudlin "melerdramer" type, or the slapstick hilarity variety, and what I crave is honest-to-goodness bubbling mirth, that will leave me feeling like a new man.

* * *

READ a poem the other day about a boy who was walking in the woods and heard the tall pine trees talking to each other. That night he played all that they had said, on his fiddle. . . . I wish all musical backgrounds for outdoor screen scenes would do that—tell us what is being said by forests, streams, ocean waves, mountains, or whatever is being depicted—and do it in such a manner that there would be no consciousness of the instruments that were doing the interpreting.

* * *

AS I passed two little girls on the street, one said to the other, "Oh, no, that's my uncle's brother!"

* * *

COROT, the great landscape-painter, did not receive the recognition due him until he was approaching his seventy-fifth year. In fact, it is said that his skill was not at its highest until he was seventy-one years of age. . . . Maybe there still is a chance for some of us who seem to be getting nowhere fast.

* * *

A GROUP of merchants in this small New York State town is considering the formation of a Merchant's Protective Association. The purpose of such an organization would be to correct the many evils that creep into advertising, such as misleading statements and exaggerated claims made in merchants' advertising occasionally, breaking down the morale of the shopping public. Now, if the film industry would take this as an indication that a "cycle" of restrained and reliable advertising is approaching, I am sure that at least its small town clientele would be very happy about the whole thing.

* * *

THIS is the sort of day that makes one think of things like Helen Mitchel's poem, *Tioga Road*. I defy anyone to read that without feeling the spell of the Sierras.

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

NOT A CIRCUS, BUT . . .

FRANKLY speaking, I like to go to the circus because I like to see horses and slim ladies who obey the loud commands of the ring-master and other barrel-chested males. I can laugh at the clowns, but too much of them spoils the circus for me. Not that I would dare to draw actual comparisons between a circus and the Hal Roach comedy, *Swiss Miss*, on the preview credit sheet of which Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy's names are the only ones typed in capitals. Nor is it musically really an important production, the score being by Phil Charig, musical direction in charge of Marvin Natley. Two or three of the tunes are quite entertaining in a joyful sense of that word. Of these I shall speak anon. Chorus work, too, is good. One musical gag is particularly funny. Soap bubbles come out of organ pipes when a bucket of suds is upset and the water runs into the organ pipes on the floor below. In due course, bubbles come out of the tune holes when the instrument is played. There is more monkey-business, including a chimpanzee, but to me the pleasant surprise was the presence of two quite uncommonly voiced singers, Walter Woolf King, a baritone, and Della Lind, Vienna soprano, who is to be starred in the Los Angeles Civic Light opera season during the week of May 23, when Charles Previn conducts *The Student Prince*.

Mixing Things Up . . .

OF COURSE, the emphasis of the whole production is on amusement and the lightly tripping, frolicking music for the title leaves no doubt to that. One hears a bit of pretty yodeling, because *Swiss Miss* plays in the land of the Emmenthaler. One hears also some infectious country dances. Of the more original melodies I would mention the *Cricket Song*. Unfortunately it is orchestrated with a trowel, although the noise unloosened by the operator, probably under official orders, was big enough for a five-alarm fire. Perhaps the orchestration is better than it sounded on this occasion, but it seemingly lacked the characteristics of specific instruments which the title suggests. As a tune it is winsome. Unfortunately, it is taken over, without rhyme or reason, by a full-throated chorus, brought into nighly unbelievable presence, (one could not call it action by the longest stretch of imagination), by a mere switch of the camera, as it were. In fact this sort of thing, occurring again with slight variations, made one wonder whether *Swiss Miss* is a film-musical, or an old-fashioned stage operetta, transferred rather sweepingly to the screen. Speaking of transfers, Laurel and Hardy have to move a piano from a hotel to a tree house.

Clever But Helter-Skelter . . .

IN SHORT, *Swiss Miss* is a Laurel and Hardy quadruple-fisted comedy with bits of operetta thrown in. It suggests a meal of several courses, served quick-

ly and not entirely in the usual order. While the two comedians are stuck with the piano on a flimsy bridge, suddenly some not exactly meaningful background music is heard for a few moments. It does not even swing in telling rhythm with the bridge. Della Lind's first song, coloratura, too, lacks introduction or motivation. She has a lovely voice, but is not a coloratura and large portions of this florid piece were not sung in tune. For which there is no excuse in the films. During a gypsy song the soprano, however, revealed brilliant qualities in every respect, singing with splendid emphasis and perfect purity. She is a singer decidedly meriting better opportunities than in this role. This applies also to Walter Woolf King, possessor of a splendidly resonant, easy and warm-toned baritone which he displays naturally and with musical ease. King is given more opportunities and he impresses me as a singer who, with the proper music-histrionic assignments, should prove a profitable asset to any studio. Neither artist may be vocally well-known on the screen, but an enterprising and far-sighted producer could earn his official title for that very reason. It is relatively easy to make the marquee lights shine more brightly with such names as Swarthout or Eddy, but it requires producing with lesser known singers. That is no reflection on these artists just named. Quite the contrary, I believe they would rise to the occasion.

What Do They Remember? . . .

NO ONE can deny that films are essentially a visual art. Primarily they are a dramatic art, in which the story, the words and manner in which they are spoken, and music form the chief components together with actors and acting, musicians and music-making, stage settings plus that corps of craftsmen from designers to directors and photographers. In short, pictures presume an immensely complex and ramified process from the moment of conception on a story-writer's typewriter to the final touches of the closing chords of the end title. There are many "forgotten" men and women on the payrolls of Hollywood today. Few of them complain, and vitally important as music is today to the picture, strangely little is said about it in publicity and the review columns of the press. That may be due to the poor calibre of music which accompanied pictures until a few years ago. In the first sound pictures music, like sound, was more of a phenomenon than expression, somewhat as in the case of the first color pictures, color as pigment was a thrilling addition irrespective of the subtler qualities of color achieved since. But music has added and is adding more than color, and even apart from the song-hit composer or the popular singer, merits more recognition at the source of inception than it receives. Private comment and increasing fan-mail from the general public indicates that effective background music is making more of

an impression, in fact an impression so lasting as to impress even the heads of music departments.

Does It Sell Tickets? . . .

IN ONE of the major studios there hangs a framed legend in practically every office. The challenge reads: "Does It Sell Tickets?" It is a justified question, a most important question. The exhortation hangs also in various rooms of the music department, but there is also that other question: "Would it not sell more tickets, if it (the music) were publicized more than happens to be the case practically without exception?" In order to avoid allusions and so as not to seem personal I will not use names. The process of reasoning seems to be that if the singer be a famous actor or a famous prima donna, the mere glamor of the name will suffice to advertise the picture. The other assumption is that if so-and-so sings, it is in itself advertising for a song. Of course, the composer is mentioned, but hardly more than that. A certain studio paid a composer, nationally known for more than 20 years, a record-breaking figure. The photographic files at the studio did not obtain a single picture and nowhere on the lot were there to be had complete data about this composer. However, I am of the opinion that pictures and legitimate story material on this composer and about a considerable number of his lesser famous colleagues and musical associates, would prove valuable promotion material. Would it sell tickets? It certainly would, if convincingly presented.

Once More the Academy . . .

I DO hope Hollywood film musicians will make an early start to set up a system of determining claims for the different Academy awards for music which will obviate the errors of last March. In the *Hollywood Spectator* of March 19 I discussed the highly debatable, because artistically unwarranted, selections of winners. Music was compared, i.e., dumped into the same classification, although comparisons were not based on proper knowledge and equality of approach. Comparisons and preferences led to decisions, when and where considerations of quality or appeal could not be the same. A score compiled from famous popular classics naturally won over super-excellent but original background scores. I think the remedy must come from the musicians. The board of the Academy no doubt desires a sane approach to the questions involved. But, again, this correction must come from the musicians of Hollywood. They must insist on a fair process if they wish fair findings. And fair findings will result in greater rewards for the living. The winning score, *One Hundred Men and a Girl*, was an excellent one, but, except for adding certain classics to the musical screen literature of this country, the honor choice did nothing to advance original screen music in Hollywood. What are the composers and music department heads of Hollywood going to do in the matter? And when will they do it?

Musical Movie-Go-Round . . .

RECORDINGS for MGM's *Great Waltz* take place in the huge Versailles ballroom set used for *Marie Antoinette*. The picture will show several scenes in which Johann Strauss conducts a super-orchestra of some 90 players. So the studio employs for the recording of those scenes an orchestra of as many performers as the audience will see. To top this, the luscious-toned Toscha Seidel plays the violin soli and obligati which Ferdinand Gravet will enact on the screen. The score will bear the name of Dmitri Tiomkin who is doubly busy as he is writing also the music for Henry Hathaway's *Spawn of the North* at Paramount. It was an interesting sight to see the orchestra in the somewhat stripped ballroom with its lavish array of monumental clusters of massive columns and porticos suggesting heavy marble structure. The floor is still laid with black and white marble squares a yard square at least. One could easily imagine being in a shell-torn Madrid concert hall, the orchestra carrying on, despite the damage done to the hall. MGM's music chief, Nathaniel Finston, let me listen to two vocal test records made some time ago with orchestral background by Joan Crawford. The star most evidently possesses not only surprising but quite distinctive vocal qualities, to judge from these excerpts from Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffman* and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. She is working now with Rosenstein, MGM's vocal expert.

Another Roundelay . . .

ONE of the Crawford recordings is a duet and her partner is no other than the illustrious Rosa Ponselle. MGM already has more eminently artistic singers under contract than any other studio. Whether Ponselle's name will be added to that stellar list, Nathaniel Finston would not say. But, he is much of a diplomat. . . . I am glad to see W. Frank Harling back on the Paramount roster. He wrote part of the music for *Souls at Sea*, incidentally some of the best of the score. He has been assigned to make music for *Men with Wings*. . . . If Sam Goldwyn really makes a picture based on the experiences of an exiled musician in Europe—with Jascha Heifetz playing violin soli—I could hardly think of a better composer than Louis Gruenberg. Not that Gruenberg is an exile. *Emperor Jones* opera is one of his best-known works. And Gruenberg is sufficiently versatile and theatre-minded to suit Producer Goldwyn. . . . I see that Frank Lloyd will make a sound version of *Divine Lady*. The silent version was accompanied by a lovely score based chiefly on authentic English tunes and sea chanties. It was made by Louis Silvers and Cecil Copping. . . . Twentieth Century-Fox is about to "glorify" Irving Berlin's tunes, Paramount announcing a film called *St. Louis Blues*, Selznick making ready for *Gone With the Wind*. That will mean good Negro music and singing of Spirituals. Which makes me think of Carlyle Scott's Negro chorus. Conductor Scott makes his own arrangements, not published yet, and they together with his singers should prove a find for a music-minded producer.

CAMERA ANGLES

By Robert Joseph

MANY THOUSAND POTENTIALS...

RECENTLY in the *Spectator* it was pointed out that a number of leading commercial film producing companies were invading the exhibition field, that carefully and interestingly made documentaries were slowly supplanting inferior short subjects pushed out by Hollywood. The market for these commercials was estimated at about four hundred thousand points of exhibition. Up to that time, however, the market was the special province of the commercial film, distributed gratis for the promotional value of certain products. It was also indicated at the time that both Eastman and Bell & Howell were prepared to sell an inexpensive 16mm camera and sound machine within a short time. However, another firm, the Gumbiner Synchro Sound Co., announced a perfected sight and sound machine, to market at about one-fifth the cost of the regular 35mm machine, or for approximately \$1300.

Tower Film Productions...

JEROME BRESSLER, formerly with Supreme Pictures, sensed the potential market for films which did not have a special commercial message to impart. It does not follow that because some commercials are well made, and therefore unobtrusive, they all are. And it is reasonable to assume that the 16mm exhibitor market would welcome good non-commercial films. To answer this need Bressler formed Tower Productions and announced the filming of the first full length 16mm feature picture, *Pinnocchio*, based on the Italian fairy story. His 16mm production plans have the same elements as 35mm production with one exception. The costs are about one-fifth as great for a picture of the same magnitude on the larger negative. Using "fire proof film," a new development employing cellulose acetate instead of cellulose nitrate, and planning to shoot ten reels, Bressler assembled a production unit of capable men. Leon Barsha will direct the picture, scripted by Endre Bohem. Robert Cline, well-known westerns cameraman and Richard Leitner, the sound engineer who perfected the Gumbiner machine, will act as technicians. Film editor Roy Luby, one of Hollywood's most prolific cutters, will do the final editing. Gerhardt Dorn will write the musical score, and Paul Palmentola will design and execute the sets. The cast will include ninety-two speaking roles.

Blueprint for the Future...

MAJOR studios have long recognized the necessity for doing away with the cumbersome and expensive 35mm equipment. This machinery jumps costs before a foot of film has been taken. Producers interested in paring costs have been waiting for a 16mm machine which will eliminate excessive expenses. This

Tower Film, the first of its kind, becomes a blueprint for Hollywood to watch. Enough money is being spent to make it a worthy rival of any 35mm picture of the same type. The market is wide open for feature length pictures which have nothing to sell but entertainment. *Pinnocchio* may open new vistas.

* * *

GOOD WORD FOR CAMERAMAN...

WHEN I go to a mystery picture I like to be mystified. A palm, then, to Cameraman Stanley Cortez for his masterly handling of the cemetery sequences in *The Lady In The Morgue*. It looked like night and it looked like a cemetery. I also enjoyed his work in panning and trucking, according to the quick cuts designated by Director Garrett. Cortez worked fast; but he worked well. Let this be a tribute to all cameramen who do more than start when the director says "Let's go!" and stop when he says, "Cut!"

* * *

FAIR EXCHANGE IS NO ROBBERY...

RECENTLY Connecticut's Supreme Court ruled that Bank Night was a lottery, "contrary to the public policy of this state." Oklahoma's Attorney General made a similar ruling against a game called "hospitality night." District Attorney Foley of Bronx, New York, banned chance games. The government ruled that notice of bank nights through the mail was illegal. The Federal Communications Commission ruled that there could be no bank night information given over the air. The trend, it seems, is showing the way back to showmanship. If the present sweep against theatre chance games should be successful, the independent exhibitor and the chain manager will have to get back to the business of selling patrons motion pictures. Though exhibitors have rarely voiced their opinion on bank night and other games, it is safe to assume that chance games came in unwanted with the steady flow of inferior B pictures. Give-aways and take-aways formed poor substitutes for good pictures; but they were substitutes.

Allied Theatres Attitude...

ON REFLECTION it could only have been the desperate situation of exhibitors with nothing to exhibit which drove the president of the Allied Theatre Owners of the Northwest to write to Sam Goldwyn anent his New York arrival remarks on Hollywood inferiority, "wait until these chance games are definitely out of existence. You won't only be compelled to run double features in the palaces that you and other producers have acquired; but you will find that triple features, and even four of your so-called B, C, D and E pictures won't get them in."

Even Stephen...

THE president's expression seems to be more rooted in bitterness than in logic. But his attitude is understandable. The industry is slowly taking away the showman's chief drawing power, the chance games. Hollywood recognizes the evil of theatre lot-

tery, as surely as do the theatremen themselves. But with the courts lined up against money and dish nights, why not even up the score and let Hollywood line itself up against some of the major evils that it itself promulgates? The same Allied outfit refers specifically to the Saturday and Sunday night radio shows that exploit Hollywood talent as well as Hollywood's chief product, its motion pictures. Writes the Allied president again, "You and a few other producers decided that you could ruin the business entirely if you would take all of your outstanding stars and give the public free entertainment via the radio . . . on nights of the week during the peak of what is supposed to have been the peak hours of show business." Why not a balanced compromise? No free give-aways in the theatres; and no free give-aways over the air?

MINOR NOTES ON MAJOR THEME . . .

THE German government, in its current campaign to find substitutes for everything except cannon fodder, announces that one of its chemists has discovered a way of treating celluloid to transform it into a highly volatile material, easily adaptable for explosives. In March, 1954, with bombs dropping on all sides, from his ivory tower, high over Radio City, Quigley will say to Terry Ramsaye, "That was no propaganda; that was Emil Jannings in *Der Herrscher*." . . . An Australian exhibitor recently built the Ozone Theatre, at Glenelg. He included a special room, fitted on all sides with glass windows, for the use of fretful children and their mamas. This he calls the "crying room." Also appended is a tea shop and a luxurious comfort lounge. The theatre of the future will be equipped with bingo games, crying rooms, ping pong tables, dance halls—and even a few seats for those who might come to see a motion picture . . . Alexander Korda, always with an eye to the different thing, will produce a picture in Australia during the fall of this year. However, he will not leave his desk in London. Rushes will be flown to London every week, and important matters will be taken care of over the phone and radio. This is nothing new, for some Hollywood producers directed their productive energies from the reserved stalls at Santa Anita. . . . *To The Victor* is gathering early honors for the best picture of the current season. One patron complained to G-B Exchange Manager Stern that the picture was nice but the Scottish Highland exteriors and interiors indicated a cheap budget. . . .



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SIR HUGH WALPOLE DISCUSSES CINEMA

EXTRACT from an interview with the eminent English author, Sir Hugh Walpole, published in *Film Weekly*, London. Readers of the *Spectator* will notice that in stating that the main trouble with Hollywood's pictures is the producers' lack of knowledge of the nature of their medium, Sir Hugh expresses an opinion the *Spectator* advanced years ago and many times has repeated.

WHEN I leave the cinema (said Sir Hugh) after seeing the average Hollywood picture my mind is a complete blank. The film was probably quite slick and amusing, but I might just as well have gone to the nearest cafe and had a cup of tea and a crumpet. The effect upon my mind, in both cases, is exactly the same. I can, of course, remember the main trend of the story, but I have completely forgotten the expressions which passed across the faces of the characters and how the incidents were worked out. It is all just a hazy dream, and within a few hours the whole film has vanished from my mind like a mirage. Why is it, then, that for days and even weeks after seeing *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* I can plainly recall, among many other things, the sequence in which the tortoise falls downstairs? There is only one answer. I remember it because Disney happens to be an artist with great and original powers of perception. What does a tortoise feel like when it finds itself on its back? That is a question which anyone of us who has ever seen a tortoise must have pondered. Disney, because he is endowed with true artistic perception, is able to give us the answer. He studies all his animals first-hand. Having discovered the universal and invariable truth about a tortoise he is able, with legitimate exaggeration, to convey his information to the world at large.

Novelettish Exaggeration . . .

IN THE majority of Hollywood films the exaggeration is of a very different sort. They are completely artificial from beginning to end, and beneath the flamboyant emotionalism there is not one grain of perception or truth. The incidents and characters are confused and second-hand, like the incidents and characters in a novelette. The reason one so often encounters these half-formed, unconvincing characters on the screen is because the film industry has never really grasped the true nature of the cinema. Producers have borrowed too many ideas from literature and from the stage and have tried to place on the screen situations which are purely theatrical or literary. Actors, trained on the stage, are placed on a chalk-line in front of the camera and are expected to create a character as they would in the theatre. Acting in the Thespian sense has no place on the screen. It is quite impossible in films to create a three-dimensional character as on the stage. The whole process should be completely different. To cover up the essential superficiality and insignificance of the characters thus created, the producers found it advisable

to pick out certain of the players and glamorise them with publicity about their private lives, their love-affairs, yachts, clothes and motor cars.

Disney Ignores the Theatre . . .

THE stars became the necessary labels with which to sell an otherwise uninteresting commodity. In every film in which a particular star appeared, he or she gave the same old performance against a new background. Thus you get the star convention, which in the past has been the greatest brake on progress. It is said to be impossible to sell a film without the 'label.' Yet Disney, because he understands the nature of the screen and can produce living entertainment, is able to pack cinemas all over the world (even in the Middle West) without the aid of stars. Disney is consistently successful because he has ignored theatrical ideas and the normal conventions of Hollywood and has created a type of entertainment which suits perfectly the two-dimensional qualities of the screen. Far from trying to disguise the limitations of the cinema he has created a little world of phantasy (much as did Lewis Carroll in literature), through which he can express the many things he has observed first-hand from life.

COMMERCIAL FILMS

DEAR MR. BEATON:

We have read with keen interest your editorial comment headed "Commercials and Audiences" in the *Hollywood Spectator* of April 9th, and wish to take this opportunity of thanking you for the sane, fair attitude expressed concerning theatrical advertising films of a certain type.

As you may or may not know, Caravel has been the first non-theatrical organization to enter the regular exhibition field with sponsored films wherein the entertainment qualities of this type of film have been of first importance and the sponsor's message has been intelligently included at the end of the production and as a component part of the story.

To prove this point, we have produced and are now distributing for Bristol-Myers, makers of Ipana, a single reel Technicolor subject called *Boy Meets Dog*. The story material is based on one of the best known syndicated newspaper comic features, "Reg'lar Fellers"; the special songs are the work of Frank Churchill, composer of *Snow White*; the large background symphonic-swing orchestra is conducted by Nathaniel Shilkret; and the film carries a remarkable voice impression of Fred Allen, as well as other well-known stars.

It has been our object to insure the entertainment qualities of our sponsored films by the use of names, story material, production staffs comparable with the finest example of short production by the other major organizations. The sponsor's message is presented as a logical part of the story for a duration of sixteen seconds near the end of the film.

That thousands of motion picture patrons are in accord with the views expressed by you in your editorial comment has been proven during the past month with the presentation of *Boy Meets Dog* on the first-run screens of various theatres in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Richmond, Norfolk, Baltimore and other cities. In each instance motion picture patrons, over their names and addresses, have indicated keen appreciation of the entertainment qualities of this type of sponsored film and their desire to see more productions of this nature.

In connection with the point you make that the industry proper does not wish producers of sponsored pictures to give them to exhibitors without cost, may we point out that this has been one of the evils of this phase of exhibition in the past, and the majority of advertising films have been of such low entertainment grade and of such high advertising content, that not only could first-run exhibitors not present them on their screens, but the producer and sponsor have had difficulty obtaining screen circulation in the smaller theatres.

We are offering the entire exhibition field pictures which have received the unqualified critical endorsement of the motion picture trade press, as per the campaign book I am sending to you under separate cover, and instead of asking exhibitors to run these pictures without cost, we are paying for the screen circulation at a rate commensurate with the number of patrons reached by this medium of advertising.

To prove our point that this type of sponsored film is as acceptable to the exhibitor as it is to his patrons, the theatres which up to date have presented *Boy Meets Dog* have accorded more theatre and general publicity to it than to various other shorts of major organizations which have appeared on the same program.

Caravel Distributing Corporation
By BERT ENNIS

New York, N. Y.

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A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—May 28, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 7

What's Winnie Sheehan Doing?

The Editor Thinks it is Time for the Maker
of so Many Box-Office Successes to
Get Back Into Harness and
Show How it is Done



Loss of Box-Office Value in Many Cases is Due to
Efforts of Players to Improve Acting Technique



THREE COMRADES ★ HOLIDAY ★ YELLOW JACK ★ KIDNAPPED

THE GIRL WAS YOUNG ★ HUNTED MEN ★ THE DEVIL'S PARTY

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EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM



From the EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

HE SUGGESTS WINFIELD SHEEHAN . . .

SIGNED by initials which apparently I am supposed to recognize but which I cannot decipher, comes a note: "I heartily agree with what you say about having more pictures made by the production executives who turned out so many winners in the days of blessed silence. In that connection—what about Winnie Sheehan? What is he doing? He took more chances and won on them than any other producer in the business. Look up his record. It will suggest some interesting comments to support your arguments in this week's *Spectator*." I am indebted to O. J. B.—or is it K. Q. M.?—well, anyway, I am indebted to him for his suggestion. But I do not have to do much delving to recall the high spots of Winfield Sheehan's reign as king of the Fox studio. He brought that producing organization from a tail-ender to a position in the first rank, and he did it by doing things that other producers lacked the nerve to do. He revealed a greater intuitive grasp of the fundamental appeal of screen entertainment than any of the heads of other studios revealed in their output.

When Winnie Took a Chance . . .

WELL do I recall the dubious head-shakings when Winnie Sheehan announced the names of the two players who were to play the leads in *Seventh Heaven*. It was to be an important silent picture by virtue of the attention the play had attracted; only recognized stars could realize its full box-office possibilities—and he had cast two unknowns! Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell—who were they? What had either of them done? Winnie must be slipping! But as it was Hollywood's habit in those days to attend a Carthay Circle opening no matter what the picture was, the house was filled at the *Seventh Heaven* premiere, and after it was over more wet handkerchiefs were carried out of the theatre than ever before or since, and next day the whole town was talking about Janet and Charlie, and also about Frank Borzage, whose direction developed the possibilities Winnie had sensed in the two unknowns. *Seventh Heaven* ran twenty-two weeks at the Carthay, four more than the recent run of *Snow White*, which holds the talkie record for the house and is the only sound picture which ran even half as long as the silent *Seventh Heaven*.

Some Box-Office Records . . .

ANOTHER Sheehan picture, *What Price Glory?*, holds the Carthay record, twenty-three weeks, three days; another, *Sunrise*, ran longer than any talkie except *Snow White*; and still another, *Four Sons*, ran only one week behind *Sunrise*. Those were the silent days. When Winnie went over to talkies he continued to lead the pack. Until the Disney picture came along, he held the Carthay talkie record with *They Had to See Paris*. He made the first screen review with music and dance numbers, and the first comedy-drama with songs, *Sunny Side Up*, which grossed just a little this side of five million dollars. I can recall other successes for which he was responsible after sound succeeded silence, *State Fair*, *In Old Arizona*, *Street Angel*, *East Lynne*, *Merely Mary Ann*, *David Harum*, *The Farmer Takes a Wife*—and the great *Cavalcade*, a truly noble picture. Among players whom he presented for the first time in talking pictures, are the late Will Rogers, Shirley Temple, Spencer Tracy, Janet Gaynor, Warner Baxter, Victor McLaglen, Edmund Lowe, Alice Fay, Paul Muni, and a host of others.

Young, Vigorous, Busy . . .

THE Sheehan policy from the first was one it would have profited the whole industry to have followed. He used pictures to make stars, not stars to make pictures. He was establishing box-office value for the Fox trademark, which now, like other trademarks, means nothing on a marquee. Of course, with the dawn of sound he abandoned the business in which he was so successful and entered one of an entirely different kind, as all the other producers did, but as one of the most intelligent silent producers, he seems to be the logical one to lead the rest of them back to sanity. It is a year or two since I last helloed to Winnie, and I know nothing of his plans; but I know he is young, vigorous and is not idle. Someone told me he is interested actively in mining and in developing his ranch. I will have to look him up and tell him he should get busy making pictures again, not as the head of a studio with the responsibility of scores of productions, but in charge of his own unit and making just enough pictures to allow him to incorporate his own picture wisdom in each of them. I hope the days of one-man control of pro-

duction on motion picture lots is passing. It tends to standardize a product which depends for its box-office value on its lack of a suggestion of standardization. . . . The more I think of this idea of getting Winnie Sheehan back into harness the more I like it, and I am dead sure exhibitors would like it. They need the kind of pictures he would make. For suggesting him as a topic for discussion I am grateful to J. X. G.—or is it Y. P. Z.?

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SHOULD FOLLOW WALTER'S EXAMPLE . . .

SEEMS queer to me that there is no news broadcaster on the air with sense enough to profit by the success of Walter Winchell. Recently the KFI night news broadcast presented six bits of news, the narrator reading endless details of each, even going so far as to mention the names of the arresting officers in some criminal case in Texas. Winchell gives us flashes of about sixty bits of news and lets us look in next day's papers for the details. That is why he has a larger audience than any other news broadcaster in the country. What he does could be done by the little fellows out here, if they had brains enough to realize it.

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WESTERNS AND THE BOX-OFFICE . . .

FRED ASTAIRE wants to don a ten-gallon hat and do a Western, says a newspaper paragraph. It is a good idea. Dollar for dollar of production costs, Westerns have earned ten times the revenue of any other kind of pictures Hollywood has made, yet the big producers feel it is beneath their dignity to make them. When they do make one, such as Paramount's *Wells Fargo*, they call it something else. The box-office would benefit if every big star were presented in a Western, or at least in an out-door picture, once a year.

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PLAYERS AND BOX-OFFICE VALUE . . .

QUITE a lot has been heard lately about the loss of box-office standing by some of our prominent stars. Box-office values are going down rapidly and there are not ten people in Hollywood whose names will draw customers irrespective of the pictures in which they are appearing. I doubt if there ever were ten at one time who were strong enough to do that. There are several score who are liked when they appear in pictures their public likes and who are the same people in all their pictures. The mistaken conception that the screen is an acting art has reduced the drawing power of scores of marquee names. We expect our film barons to make that mistake, for they themselves are mistakes, are in control of a medium of the nature of which they are completely ignorant. But we would think players, whose profession requires more brains, as they cannot sit back, keep their minds on racing charts, and get others to do their work—we would think they would know something about the medium in which they express themselves. Few of them do. Practically all the seri-

ous and ambitious ones are doing all they can to reduce their box-office value. They want to be actors, and acting never has been a commodity which sells readily over the box-office counter.

Actors and Personalities . . .

A DECADE ago the *Spectator* declared that Hollywood should look for personalities, not for actors; and when the screen went talkie it lifted its voice against the wholesale importation of Broadway players. But picture producers wanted to put on style; they imagined they had become highbrows, suddenly had acquired culture, and nothing except the English spoken on the stage in London and New York would match their new conception of themselves. I argued then that going over wholly to the stage ultimately would bring the film industry to its knees. I did not think it would take so long in doing it, but the situation I predicted is the one that is here now. Only a handful of players have box-office value because there are only that number among those entrusted with star roles. The rest are not persons; they are actors and actresses. Would you class as actresses Shirley Temple, Sonja Henie, Deanna Durbin, Jane Withers! What do they know about acting? Yet each of them is worth a million dollars as an asset of a film producing company. Is Gary Cooper an actor? He certainly is not, yet *Variety's* worldwide survey of actual box-office draw during 1937 revealed Gary as the world's outstanding box-office figure.

Stage Actors Not Box-Office . . .

WHEN it came our Academy's time to pick the two best performances of last year, it named that of Luise Rainer in *The Good Earth*, and that of Spencer Tracy in *Captains Courageous*. Neither of these pictures is among the best ten box-office performers of last year. *Motion Picture Herald's* list of the ten best box-office players last year once more had Shirley Temple at its head. On both *Variety's* and *Herald's* lists we find the names of Shirley, Gary, Clark Gable, William Powell, Myrna Loy, Astaire-Rogers and Bob Taylor. The Academy winners do not appear on either list, nor does the name of one of the widely exploited stage importations. All the leading film favorites are people who either have not been on the stage or who achieved no prominence on it. And still we have a studio as important as Warners encouraging its future stars to appear in stage plays as a method of learning how to act on the screen. That would be on a par with a medical school telling its students they would become better doctors if they would spend a year or so in a law college.

Take Joan and Janet . . .

TO BRING the subject out of the realm of purely abstract reasoning, let us look for some facts to support our contention that the screen is not an acting art. To start with, we find that in the silent days before the broad-A era, there were a dozen box-office names to every one we have now; and not among them was one which would have meant anything on a three-sheet in front of a legitimate the-

atre. In those days acting was not wanted. Audiences wanted a Joan Crawford, a natural, spirited, come-hell-or-high-water sort of girl it could get to know; or it wanted a Janet Gaynor, the spiritual type, elusive, with emotional appeal and eyes which asked for help. Joan has lost box-office strength since then, and players of the Janet type have retained theirs. When we analyse the cases of Joan and Janet we will fix more definitely the place of acting in screen entertainment and its rating at the box-office.

Not the Same Old Joan . . .

JOAN is a girl I always have admired as an artist and liked as a friend. She has great ambitions, ability to achieve them and strength of determination to do so. Pictures caught her young, at an age when all of us know nothing, but think we do. She soon became a favorite, climbed into the upper salary bracket. She had exactly what the public wanted. But Joan is not a girl who can stay put. She knew she was not an actress, that she was just a girl a lot of people seemed to like, and she determined to become, not only an actress, but a great one. Anyone would applaud ambition and determination like that. Joan has become a really fine actress, and Bruno Ussher—no one is a better judge—tells me she is on her way to becoming a great singer. But what of the jolly Joan, the hell-cat or the purring kitten, we first fell in love with? She has become a great lady and no longer plays in our mental alley. I do not mean Joan has gone high-hat on us. Far from it. She is the same honest, straight-forward, square-shooter she always has been, the same good fellow and good friend, but she is not the Joan who created the dyed-in-the-wool Joan Crawford fans. She is passing into the Luise Rainer-Paul Muni class, and you will notice their names are a long way down on the box-office list.

Personality Universal Box-Office . . .

AND what of Janet Gaynor? There is nothing much to say about her. She is the same wide-eyed, appealing little thing who won our hearts in *Seventh Heaven*, whose "I, too, am a remarkable fellow!" in that picture still is one of the great screen moments. No burning ambition spurred her on; she has been content with her lot since her performance in *The First Year* convinced her of the wisdom of continuing to be a person and not striving to be an actress. That is what her fans want, and as long as she remains that way she will hold her fans. If Shirley Temple, Deanna Durbin and Sonja Henie are fortunate enough to escape being persuaded to take lessons in acting, they, too, will hold their fans until they grow old together. Shirley thus far has survived all the tricks her studio has had her perform, for the light is too bright within her to be dimmed even by Darryl's lack of understanding of the inner quality which makes all the world love her. Acting is not box-office. The box-office is the sum total of all the people. Acting is for that portion of the people who can appreciate it and who have the inclination to do so. Personality appeals to them and also

to those who cannot appreciate acting, thus personality is universal box-office.

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DIRECTORS STRONGLY ORGANIZED . . .

THE recent election of officers and directors of Screen Directors' Guild put at the head of the organization a group of men of such outstanding importance that the less prominent members need have no concern over the manner in which their interests will be served in any negotiations with producers. With Frank Capra serving as president and backed by the united strength of those who serve with him—sensible, level-headed men with faith in their cause and strength to insist upon their demands—the Guild promises to have an auspicious year. The full official roster: Frank Capra, president; W. S. Van Dyke, first vice-president; Howard Hawks, second vice-president; Frank Tuttle, secretary; Rowland V. Lee, treasurer; board of directors, in addition to those above, Herbert Biberman, John Cromwell, John Ford, Gregory LaCava, Rouben Mamoulian, Lewis Milestone, Phil Rosen, A. Edward Sutherland, William Wellman, William K. Howard, Leo McCarey. There is not one in the list who could not get for the asking any concessions he would like producers to make. The only reason for service is to be of assistance to those in a less fortunate position.

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SENATE SHOCKS FILM INDUSTRY . . .

THE passage by the Senate of the Neely anti-block booking bill came as a shock to the film industry. The big producing organizations, stupified by their rapid growth into believing themselves omnipotent, with full confidence in the effectiveness of Will Hays as a lobbyist who would spend discreetly their money investment in the effort to defeat the bill, were not prepared for such sudden action by the Washington solons. But the film industry should have seen it coming. And it should not take for granted that the bill will not pass in the lower house. It should prepare now to meet the changed conditions its final passage would create. One of the industry's weaknesses is that it never prepares for what is coming, devoting its attention always to doing again the things it already has done. As far back as its February 24, 1934, issue, the *Spectator*, in course of an article on screen business ethics, remarked, "The block booking practice is too vicious to last. Its days are numbered." At that time I did not foresee the long fight the proponents of the bill would have to wage before results were obtained.

Industry Has Few Friends . . .

THAT the film industry would be better off if it were forced to readjust its methods by the elimination of block booking always has been a *Spectator* contention. That the Senate action was no surprise to it is evidenced by this quotation from its issue of March 12, 1938: "After years of effort exhibitors finally have succeeded in getting their anti-block booking bill out of committee and before the United States Senate. Its passage . . . is more probable than

improbable. . . . The film industry, as an institution, has few friends. Since its beginning it has dictated to its only customers, the exhibitors, and has itself to thank for the bill now before Congress. The wide exploitation given its enormous salary figures has not endeared it to those in whose hands is the disposition of the bill." In stating that pictures had few friends in Washington, the *Spectator* had nothing to go on except its belief that such must be the case, as the enormous salaries and bonuses paid film executives at the expense of the shareholders in their companies, are not calculated to engender a friendly feeling for the industry as a whole. That its belief was justified is indicated by this quotation from *Daily Variety's* story of the Senate's action: "Neely declared that at the same time numerous workers are being laid off and the major companies are pleading poverty, the executives are getting breath-taking pay checks. Compensation of Loew's and Metro's executives drew most blistering condemnation. Neely read the list of 1937 earnings and commented that 14 officials pocketed more than \$4,700,000, equivalent to 31 per cent of the corporate profits."

* * *

THEATRE MANAGER HAS HIS SAY . . .

SPECTATOR readers who have the fortitude to read all the arguments it presents and memories sufficiently sturdy to recall some of them, will find in the following quotation from a dispatch to *Variety* from Detroit, some facts which establish the soundness of opinions recently recorded in these pages. The dispatch reads: "Detroit, May 10.—'Give the stars good stories and good direction,' says H. M. Richey, general manager of Co-operative Theatres of Michigan, 'and they'll jump right back into popularity. Why not say that attempting to grind out too many pictures, without careful selection, results in poor pictures, regardless of who plays in 'em?' Chief money-makers for Michigan operators are Shirley Temple, Sonja Henie and Clark Gable opuses, with those of Kay Francis, Myrna Loy, William Powell and Gary Cooper ranking as next best. Films by others often don't make expenses, he avers."

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MODESTY BE BLOWED! . . .

ONE way the *Spectator* boosts its revenue is by persuading screen people to buy advertising space and put in it the nice things said about them by various picture reviewers. Its argument is that reproducing the nice things is good advertising—good because it is authentic, and presents, not the advertiser's opinion of himself, but the unbiased opinion of someone else. On my desk for some time has been a letter on the stationery of the National Council of Teachers of English, an organization whose membership embraces practically all the professors and teachers of English in the great universities and schools in the United States. I have been trying to think up some excuse for publishing a paragraph from the letter. I can think of none; but my ego asserts itself, my modesty vanishes, and I am doing without cost what I advise screen people to do and

pay for—I am patting myself violently on the back. The letter is from Helen Rand Miller, University of Michigan, chairman of the committee on Standards for Motion Pictures and Newspapers, and the last paragraph reads: "I plan to visit Hollywood for a few days this summer and I hope you will be there and that I can see you. People ask me, 'What movie actors do you want to see?' and I reply, 'The one person I want to see is Mr. Welford Beaton. I learn so much from his paper. I enjoy his style.'" Ronald Colman, Clark Gable, Gary Cooper, Warner Baxter, Jack Barrymore, Bill Powell, Spencer Tracy, Cary Grant, Bob Taylor and others, please note.

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MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

THERE is a real estate broker out our way whose name is Kinsey Kelsey; when you pronounce it you chuck the baby under the chin. . . . One of the kittens the neighbor's cat bestowed on us is asleep on the spaniel's head; he turns a sheepish eye on me, but carries on. . . . The people on Shirley Temple's set got up a pool on the Preakness; the one who drew Can't Wait gave the ticket the Shirley and explained it to her; she ran to her mother; "Look, Mummy," she exclaimed, "I have a horse! His name is—is—Gotta Go!" . . . The essence of publicity is an illusive element; I am not a baseball fan, never go to a game, but each morning I turn to the sport pages to find out how Joe de Maggio performed the previous day. . . . Once while still in my teens I went shooting prairie chickens in Manitoba; brought one down; saw its eyes as it died in my hands; haven't killed anything since. . . . If you overlook Mabel Keefer's contribution to each *Spectator*, you are denying yourself some delightful reading. . . . My bed table is stacked with books which since the *Spectator* became a weekly I have had no time even to skim over; must write my 1750 words a day, seven days a week. . . . But just wait until the first of July; we are going to leave the *Spectator*, the film industry and our garden flat for two weeks, and if during that time you read I have been arrested, it will be for bashing in the bean of someone who mentioned motion pictures to me. . . . The flood has something to its credit; trees, shrubs, lawns and flowers in the Valley never looked better. . . . If someone will invent male slacks—one-piece, light things you can back into in one hump—I will become a customer and agree to deliver such distinguished Valley farmers as Al Jolson, Hugh Herbert, Eddie Horton, Hal Wallis, Clark Gable, Bob Taylor, K. C. B., Leslie Fenton and Bing Crosby. . . . We gave two of our kittens to our daughter who owns a big German shepherd dog upon which the kittens sleep and whose ears they bite when they are awake. . . . This spring I am going in for strawberries for breakfast more than I ever did before. . . . I wonder how much mental influence we have over our appetites. Do we eat things because we think of them or think of them because we eat them? Discussion suspended while I go to market and carefully select tomorrow morning's breakfast.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

STORY IS ABOUT SOMETHING . . .

● **HOLIDAY**; Columbia release of Everett Riskin production; director, George Cukor; stars Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant; screen play by Donald Ogden Stewart and Sidney Buchman; from the play by Philip Barry; photography, Franz Planer; film editors, Otto Meyer and Al Clark; art directors, Stephen Goosson and Lionel Banks; interior decorations by Babs Johnstone; costumes, Kalloch; musical director, Morris Stoloff; assistant director, Clifford Broughton; sound, Lodge Cunningham. Supporting cast: Doris Nolan, Lew Ayres, Edward Everett Horton, Henry Kolker, Binnie Barnes, Jean Dixon, Henry Daniell.

A REALLY notable talkie—an abstract theme given concrete expression and coming to the screen as engrossing entertainment for those who can enjoy a story with more intellectual than emotional appeal. I have expressed quite often the opinion that when Hollywood is forced by waning box-office returns to get back into the business of making motion pictures, a few talkies can be sprinkled through its output without lessening theatre attendance. A succession of such pictures as *Holiday* would depress the box-office; an occasional one would stimulate it. Columbia has done itself proud in mounting the picture, the sets designed by Stephen Goosson and Lionel Banks, having both great pictorial value and direct story significance. The story is a discussion of the relative merits of money-making and being happy. We do not have to be told that money is Henry Kolker's god. The sets show it—and that is the only part of the story told by the camera. Every other thought is expressed in dialogue, well written and superbly directed dialogue. Some of it comes to us in whispers, some in raised voices, all of it matching the moods of the scenes in which it is uttered. If the picture had no other merit, it would be notable as a demonstration of the manner in which dialogue should be directed.

Good Writing and Direction . . .

THE script written by Donald Ogden Stewart and Sidney Buchman brings the nine-year-old stage play up to date by a few adroit allusions to contemporary matters of interest, such as, "Why work hard to make money? You have to give most of it to the government." The story's theme is developed brilliantly by the two writers who lighten its preachment quality with flashes of humor and down-to-earth philosophy for easy mental digestion. George Cukor's direction makes *Holiday* one of the smoothest examples of story-telling I have seen on any screen. The picture glides along on an even keel, the manner in which the players read their lines giving us the feeling we are rubbing elbows with members of a family concerned only with its own affairs and indifferent to our presence. Cukor's manipulation of his people, his grouping, the exits and entrances, the little bits of comedy here and there, the complete humanness of every scene, and the quick wit he reveals in taking advantage of every opportunity to inject a delightful or an illuminative little touch as an

additional adornment to a scene—all these things we find in his direction add to his already considerable stature as a film figure.

Riskin Assembles Strong Cast . . .

EVERETT RISKIN, producer of *Holiday*, gave Cukor a cast which would gladden the heart of any director. Artists all, they responded so sympathetically to the understanding direction that the whole acting pattern is woven so smoothly we see no actors in it—just people it interests us to watch as they live through a family crisis. Katharine Hepburn is a great actress. In some of her other performances I have seen this or that which I did not like, but there are neither thises nor thats in her *Holiday* performance. She is perfect, and when one says that, all is said. Cary Grant again proves himself capable of rising to the occasion. He gets into his role here, plumbs its depths, lets us read his thoughts with the eyes of the camera. Superficially a rather irresponsible fellow, one who takes life in easy strides, he never fails to keep his ideals in our minds, to let us get the serious side of him even when he does something to make us laugh. It is a beautiful performance which Cary gives.

Lew Ayres' Fine Performance . . .

LEW AYRES ascends to new heights in *Holiday*. Ever since he appeared in *All Quiet on the Western Front* I have rated him as one of the finest young actors in Hollywood, and I have not been able to understand why producers so persistently have overlooked him. Here he plays a scion of a family over-stuffed with money, a rebellious youth too weak of fiber to break the bonds which bind him and resorting to drink to ease his discontent. Lew does not voice his discontent; he acquaints us with it in more subtle ways in course of the nearest approach to a true cinematic performance the picture gives us. Doris Nolan is another who gives us an outstanding characterization. In her opening scenes, when her love for Cary fills her whole life, she is soft, gentle, sympathetic; when money becomes more important than love, she is hard, harsh, unsympathetic, her whole appearance altering until we scarcely would recognize her as the same person. Edward Everett Horton, in a part less jittery than most of those in which he is cast, gives one of the finest performances of his illustrious career. The same might be said of Henry Kolker, a rare artist we see too seldom. I rapidly am



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losing my heart to Jean Dixon. In *Holiday* she does no acting. She is just Eddie Horton's easy-to-love wife, a young woman with a sense of humor and deep understanding, who happened to become involved in the affairs of a rich family. A real screen actress is one who does not act, one like Jean Dixon. In small parts Binnie Barnes and Henry Daniell maintain the high standard set by the rest of the cast. The sound recording of Lodge Cunningham, the photography of Franz Planer and the film editing of Otto Meyer and Al Clark have much to do with making the picture so completely satisfactory.

ONE WHICH MISSES BADLY . . .

● **KIDNAPPED**; 20th Century-Fox; associate producer, Kenneth Macgowan; director, Alfred Werker; screen play, Sonya Levien, Eleanor Harris, Ernest Pascal and Edwin Blum; based on the novel by Robert Louis Stevenson; photographer, Gregg Toland; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Mark-Lee Kirk; film editor, Allen McNeil; costumes, Gwen Wakeling; sound, Eugene Grossman and Roger Heman; musical direction, Arthur Lange. Cast: Warner Baxter, Freddie Bartholomew, Arleen Whelan, C. Aubrey Smith, Reginald Owen, John Carradine, Nigel Bruce, Miles Mander, H. B. Warner, Ralph Forbes, Arthur Hohl, E. E. Clive, Halliwell Hobbes, Montagu Love, Donald Haines, Moroni Olsen, Leonard Mudie, Mary Gordon, Forrester Harvey, Clyde Cook, Russell Hicks, Billy Watson, Eily Malyon, Kenneth Hunter, Charles Irwin, John Burrtun, David Clyde, Holmes Herbert, Brandon Hurst, Vernon Steele, C. Montague Shaw, R. T. Noble.

WHEN *Kidnapped* was approaching one of its first major moments, the thought came to me that in one of the trunks in our storeroom in the rear of the garage there were a number of old golf shirts which would be just the things to wear when I work in the garden; and later on, when something else was about to happen, I decided that Roosevelt was afraid to let the New Deal go it alone in congressional elections and therefore felt he had to give his personal support to candidates favorable to his policies. On the day of the preview the Senate passed the bill outlawing block booking, and I thought about that while the picture was running. In fact, one of the nicest things about this latest Darryl Zanuck production is that it permits you to think about anything your mind lights on without losing any of its entertainment value, of which the picture has so precious little that you can get all there is between thoughts about old golf shirts and the anti-block booking bill. *Kidnapped* is one that missed. It will happen, but seldom does it happen so completely.

Story Does Not Hold Us . . .

PHYSICALLY, the picture leaves nothing to be desired. It is mounted handsomely and from a purely visual standpoint is a cinematic treat. But art departments and cameras cannot create screen entertainment. A picture must have a soul, must be a conscious thing which reaches out, pulls us into it and wraps itself around us until its tale is told. *Kidnapped* does none of this. It is boring, seems twice as long as it is. It is not a slice of life. It is a collection of backgrounds against which a number of skilled players struggle unsuccessfully to tell a story we

will believe—do their best to enlist our sympathy on behalf of Scotland in its resistance to the encroaching domination of England. Their failure to do so is not due to the fact that the issue is long since dead, has been settled by history and lacks the power to interest us. Even deader, by virtue of its greater age, is the plight of the Saxons under the Norman yoke, but *Robin Hood* interests us, in that it enlists our sympathy on behalf of the Saxons.

Story Lacks Inspiration . . .

WHAT *Kidnapped* lacks is the combined skill of a Mike Curtiz and a Bill Keighley to stir our emotions. Al Werker directs with a heavy hand, due partly to the lack of inspiration in the script he had to work with. The Century picture is a succession of scenes so lacking in conviction that they have no cumulative strength to build to emotional climaxes. Even when Warner Baxter fights his way with his sword out of a tight spot in which he finds himself, we fail to be impressed or to feel he is in danger. His parries and thrusts, in fact, were rewarded with some snickers from the preview audience. In the living theatre the players get their inspiration from the audience; in a film theatre we have the reverse, the emotional response of the audience being inspired by the players. The *Kidnapped* players fail to inspire us for they themselves obviously could find no inspiration in the material they had to work with. I come from a long line of Scotchmen, my name is as Scotch as MacDonald or MacPherson; I approached *Kidnapped* in a sort of "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled" mood, prepared mentally to smell the heather and to ask for haggis, but it left me cold. American, English, Irish and Cockney accents scarcely could create a Scotch atmosphere. I yearned for the sound of Donald Crisp's rich burr.

Players Have Tough Time . . .

WHEN a picture as a whole fails to enthuse us, it is difficult for us to isolate the performances and enthuse over them as individual contributions. Warner Baxter has too many fine performances to his credit to make us doubt his ability to handle one cut as closely to his measure as that of Alan Breck in this picture. But he faced too great odds in the manner in which he is presented in this mechanically fabricated screen play. He shares a romance with a girl too young and too inexperienced to lend conviction to his share in it. Arleen Whelan is a pretty little thing, with a Janet Gaynor voice and appealing eyes, attributes lacking the strength to justify her casting opposite Warner. Freddie Bartholomew al-

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ways is pleasing, but here he almost is taken out of character by being given grown-up things to do. The cast is too long for individual mention or for each member of it to have much to do. But there are some bits done brilliantly, among those which pleased me most being contributions of John Carradine, H. B. Warner, E. E. Clive, Nigel Bruce and Moroni Olsen. The costuming of the players gave Gwen Wakeling wide latitude in dressing them to add to the visual attractiveness developed by Gregg Toland's fine photography.

As Another Sees It . . .

ONE thing the reader should take into account is that a *Spectator* review is the uninfluenced opinion of but one person. I think *Kidnapped* is a dull, uninteresting and uninspired screen offering. It is only fair to let you read another opinion. I quote from *Hollywood Reporter*: "*Kidnapped* brings to the screen a great romance by a master story teller, and does it with beauty and power. Splendidly cast, superbly photographed, directed with sincere feeling for the dramatic values in Robert Louis Stevenson's classic tale of love and rebellion in the 18th Century Scottish Highlands, it has plenty of box-office values and should prove one of the standout productions of the day." In the same issue the *Reporter* carries twenty-eight pages of Twentieth Century-Fox advertising.

SIMPLE CHRONICLE MADE GREAT . . .

● **THREE COMRADES**; MGM; producer, Joseph L. Mankiewicz; director, Frank Borzage; screen play, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Edward E. Paramore; from novel by Erich Maria Remarque; photography, Joseph Ruttenberg; montage effects, Slavko Vorkapich; music, Franz Waxman; lyrics, Bob Wright and Chet Forrest; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associates, Paul Groesse and Edwin B. Willis; film editor, Frank Sullivan. Cast: Robert Taylor, Margaret Sullavan, Franchot Tone, Robert Young, Guy Kibbee, Lionel Atwill, Henry Hull, Charley Grapewin, Monty Woolley.

ONE of the screen's notable offerings, a picture which should charm the world. It does not tell a standard story, one with an involved plot and dramatic twists and turns. Its hero is a great friendship and its villain, circumstance. Quietly it tells what story there is, lets us see what happens to three young fellows who in World War trenches form the friendship which is the story. The three meet a girl; one of them falls in love with her and they marry, and she dies shortly after one of the three is killed while defending his principles. The picture closes on the two surviving friends starting out again to face the world, striding down a long road into their future, striding with them the shades of the wife of one and the friend of all three—shades which will be at their sides always, no matter how long they tread the path of life. A simple chronicle of unimportant things which happen to four unimportant people, it is told with a great simplicity which makes it great, with a lack of emphasis which makes it powerful. It has no what we call "big" scenes. I saw it last night, and this morning I see it as a

whole, as an even emotional pattern without arresting insertions—as one "big" scene for the full length of the film.

Borzage's Direction Outstanding . . .

HOLLYWOOD preview audiences are generous with applause when they approve what is offered them, rewarding audibly the work of players who make scenes stand out. Last night there was no audible applause; at times there were smiles and ripples of laughter to break the silence which signified the emotional spell the picture cast over those who viewed it. It was the old Frank Borzage of the silent *Seventh Heaven* days who came back to us and showed us again his human side, who wet our handkerchiefs, brought lumps to our throats, and made *Three Comrades* a beautiful poem, an emotional symphony played softly on our heart strings. In the quietly played love scenes was Frank most tender, most impressive. When the girl wife dies in her husband's arms, we see grief too great to be expressed in sobs—just a bowed head and a tightened embrace in silence louder than sound—great response to great direction. Margaret Sullavan plays her part in a manner which makes it unthinkable that any other actress should have been given the role. She has an undefinable something which all others lack, a voice which reaches our emotions as much by virtue of its quality as by the meaning of the lines she reads. Her performance in *Three Comrades* is a masterpiece of intelligent acting.

Entire Cast Proves Capable . . .

THE three comrades are played by Robert Taylor, Franchot Tone and Robert Young. We see them first as the World War ends, and follow them for a few years of their efforts to make a living in a German town. We do not credit them with acting parts—rather with being the persons they play, so sincere and impressive are they in all they do. Guy Kibbee has the most sympathetic role I have seen him play, an unobtrusive one which gets its strength from its lack of striving. Lionel Atwill is splendid in a more assertive role, and Henry Hull, Charley Grapewin and Monty Woolley are doctors—just doctors practicing their profession, not acting to attract our attention, and thereby demonstrating acting at its best. Cedric Gibbons puts a piece of Germany on the screen with that faithfulness to detail which characterizes all his work. Joseph Ruttenberg, with photography of fine quality, and Slavko Vorkapich,



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with some of his striking montage work, make valuable contributions to the production. Franz Waxman provides musical treatment which is one of the picture's assets. I was particularly impressed by the quality of the lyrics written by Bob Wright and Chet Forrest who in various pictures are revealing themselves as masters of their craft. What made the complete success possible is the highly meritorious screen play written by Scott Fitzgerald and Edward Paramore. It is fine screen writing. And praise must go to the man who had to mold all the outstanding contributions into an outstanding whole—Joe Maniewicz, producer of the picture.

Presenting Another Opinion . . .

AS I wound up my condemnation of *Kidnapped* by a quotation from *Reporter's* warm praise of it, it will balance things nicely if I reverse the process in the case of *Three Comrades* and quote from *Reporter's* condemnation of what I praise: "Its theme of youth struggling hopelessly in immediate post-war Germany is dated and too closely allied to that of *The Road Back*. Its screen play is too determinedly dramatic and philosophical. Its pace is so pedestrian as to become definitely tedious at times and it is not smooth. It has a tragic ending which is well-nigh inexcusable. And it is much, much too long." In the *Reporter* from which I quote there is no Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer advertising.

INTERESTING SCIENTIFIC EXPOSITION . . .

● **YELLOW JACK; MGM;** producer, Jack Cummings; director, George B. Seitz; screen play, Edward Chodorov; from play by Sidney Howard and Paul de Kruif; photography, Lester White; montage effects, Slavko Vorkapich; film editor, Blanche Sewell; musical score, Dr. William Axt; art directors, Cedric Gibbons, Eddie Imazu and Edwin B. Willis. Cast: Robert Montgomery, Virginia Bruce, Lewis Stone, Andy Devine, Henry Hull, C. Henry Gordon, Charles Coburn, Buddy Ebsen, Henry O'Neill, Janet Beecher, William Henry, Alan Curtis, Sam Levene, Philip Terry, Stanley Ridges, Jonathan Hale.

A MOST interesting recital of the series of events and discoveries which resulted eventually in ridding Cuba of the yellow fever which claimed the lives of so many American soldiers at the time of the occupation of the island. The picture has the desirable quality of making you feel it is authentic both as to story facts and in the physical reproduction of locales and buildings. The interest the picture holds for you will depend somewhat upon the degree of your interest in a disease which has been brought back from its grave to serve as a theme for popular entertainment. I enjoyed *Yellow Jack*. I am glad to learn anything when the process of learning is attended with no greater physical demands than that involved in taking a comfortable seat in a film theatre; but as mental stimulus I would prefer a discussion of a problem of today, some development which still has distance to go to reach perfection. And I certainly would prefer a picture with less talking. I am growing a bit weary of Hollywood's steadfast adherence to the conviction that audiences would rather use their ears than their eyes when they attend

a film theatre, a conviction which is proving expensive to exhibitors.

Comedy Is Dragged In . . .

THE screen play by Edward Chodorov suggests his realization of the lack of box-office in a purely scientific recital of the events leading to the final triumph in the battle with a puzzling disease. He had only enough real story for three or four reels of talk and action, and was forced to seek length by the interpolation of extraneous comedy and a purely manufactured romance which does not carry complete conviction. Comedy to fit into such a serious setting was so hard to contrive that there is resort to the sure-fire device of having a tub of water poured over the protesting head of Andy Devine. But the preview audience, composed largely of U.C.L.A. students who attend the Westwood Village Theatre, wanted comedy so badly that it laughed uproariously at one of the most serious scenes in the picture, that showing the plight of three soldiers who risked their lives on the chance that the scientists were on the right track. One would expect a greater display of intelligence on the part of university students, as the sequence was not written, directed or acted in a manner to provoke laughter.

Direction and Acting Excellent . . .

TECHNICALLY, *Yellow Jack* is up to Metro's long established standard, the settings reflecting the usual thoroughness of Cedric Gibbons and his staff. Lester White provided excellent photography and Slavko Vorkapich's montage effects add a striking touch. George Seitz directs with a sure hand, his contribution to the picture being one of its outstanding merits. From a capable cast he gets capable responses. Bob Montgomery's characterization of an Irish sergeant is a fine bit of work. Virginia Bruce, who shares the romance with him, is her usual clever and beautiful self. All the day down the cast list we find only names which merit praise. Lewis Stone, always the convincing artist, fits into his part as smoothly as if it were tailored to his exclusive measure. We get a few glimpses of Buddy Ebsen, a player

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of great possibilities which Metro apparently does not realize. A feature of the casting is the convincing manner in which the players look their parts. We can believe the scientists really are scientists, not actors pretending to be; and that the army officers belong in their uniforms. *Yellow Jack* does not contain everything which makes for box-office success, but I believe you will find it interesting even though it muffs what should be its dramatic highspot—the moment when the doctors realize they at last have solved their problem.

WEAK ONE FROM ENGLAND . . .

● **THE GIRL WAS YOUNG**; Gaumont-British production; directed by Alfred Hitchcock; based on the novel entitled "A Shilling for Candles," by Josephine Tey; screen play by Charles Bennett, Edwin Greenwood, Anthony Armstrong; dialogue, Gerald Savory; continuity, Alma Reville; photography, Bernard Knowles; art direction, Alfred Junge. Cast: Nova Pilbeam, Derrick De Marney, Percy Marmont, Edward Rigby, George Curzon, Pamela Carme, John Longden, George Merritt, J. H. Roberts, H. F. Maltby, John Miller, Jerry Verno.

THAT Alfred Hitchcock is perhaps England's best film director was established long ago, and as much a matter of fact is the vast popularity over there of the young actress, Nova Pilbeam, but when Hitchcock tried to make a successful picture of this one he lacked on essential element, even though he had young Miss Pilbeam and a capable technical crew: He had no story. I have remarked frequently that the manner of telling always is more important than what is told on the screen, but by that I do not mean a logical story is not essential. The *The Girl Was Young* story is not believable. The English police system is famous for its efficiency, yet the picture asks us to believe that a young fellow, held for murder, could walk out of a magistrate's court in broad daylight, later appear in a number of public places and escape detection. That is No. 1 implausibility. There are a score of others. The explanation may lie in the fact that five writers had a hand in building the story.

Has Some Good Points . . .

VISUALLY, *The Girl Was Young* is somewhat of a treat, containing frequent shots of the matchless scenery or rural England, ably photographed by Bernard Knowles. The art direction, too, leaves nothing to be desired. Hitchcock's only weakness was his selection of the story. His direction is good, particularly his handling of the dialogue. There is none of the loud talking which has featured so many American pictures and which so largely is responsible for the present unsatisfactory box-office conditions over here. The director presents us with a cast of people, not actors. Nova Pilbeam, her spiritual quality as alive as ever, gives a feeling and convincing performance. Hollywood should have a look at the leading man, Derrick De Marney, a handsome young fellow and an excellent actor. In the cast is our old friend, Percy Marmont, the same easy, effective actor as of yore. English producers complain that American releasing organizations do not give them a fair

break in this country. If Gaumont-British sends us many more like *The Girl Was Young*, its trademark will be enough in itself to make it a mistake for our exhibitors to show its pictures. Before England makes claims of bad treatment it should cease making bad pictures.

RATHER FEEBLE FARE . . .

● **THE DEVIL'S PARTY**; Universal; associate producer, Edmund Grainger; director, Ray McCarey; screen play, Roy Chanslor; from the novel, "Hell's Kitchen Has a Pantry," by Borden Chase; photography, Milton Krasner; art director, Jack Otterson; musical director, Charles Previn; song, "Things Are Coming My Way," by Jimmy McHugh and Harold Adamson. Cast: Victor McLaglen, William Gargan, Paul Kelly, Beatrice Roberts, Frank Jenks, John Gallaudet, Joseph Downing, Samuel S. Hinds, Arthur Hoyt.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

WHAT merit there is in Borden Chase's novel, *Hell's Kitchen Has a Pantry*, I cannot say, not having read the book; but it reaches the screen in *The Devil's Party* as rather shallow story material. Possibly in the book some significant social commentary surrounds the account of how a "gang" of 11th Avenue youngsters grow to maturity and find a great test placed upon their enduring friendship and loyalty. In the film there is a certain emotional appeal to their assembling for an annual dinner, one a priest, two brothers in the police department, the host a night club and gambling resort operator, and the one girl member a singer in his club. But through the picture as a whole the situations are not sufficiently developed, characters not sufficiently rounded out or motivated. We do not have enough interest in them to be much concerned about their problems when they become entangled in the circumstances which get under way on the night of their assemblage. One of the policeman brothers is slain by the gambler's henchmen, and a good deal of the action from there on is given over to controversy, some of the members explaining things to others or trying to defend the gambler against the suspicions of the remaining policeman brother. The story is vague in intent, lacking in emphasis. It slumps in the middle. The preview audience was evidently restless. A highly melodramatic and arbitrary finish did not revive interest.

Have Little to Work With . . .

PLAYERS try hard to make something of their parts, but they have little material to work with. Paul Kelly invests his part of the priest with admirable sincerity, and William Gargan is easy and spontaneous in his role. Victor McLaglen again brings to the screen a certain force of a brutish sort, though it has little relationship to the present part. One is inclined to give Director Ray McCarey the benefit of the doubt also, considering the material, though his direction is certainly not inspired. Beatrice Roberts is competent and sings a song number well. Frank Jenks contributes about the only humor in the piece. An uncredited youngster, playing the gambler as a child, is talented. The exterior of a night club was imaginatively conceived by Jack Otterson. Unless

my old orbs are failing me, however, the picture is printed on a film with a slightly greenish cast, which strikes me as being unwise, since the dark tone probably contributes to the lack of vitality in the picture. Otherwise Milton Krasner's photography is okay-doak. The featured song number, *Things Are Coming My Way*, by Jimmy McHugh and Harold Adamson, is punchy.

DIRECTED WITH CARE . . .

● **HUNTED MEN**; Paramount; associate producer, Stuart Walker; director, Louis King; assistant director, Joseph Lefert; screen play by Horace McCoy and William R. Lipman; based on a play by Albert Duffy and Marian Grant; photographed by Victor Milner, A.S.C.; art direction by Hans Dreier and Franz Bachelin; edited by Anne Bauchens; sound recording, Harold Lewis and Richard Olson; interior decorations by A. E. Freudeman; musical direction, Boris Morros. Cast: Mary Carlisle, Lloyd Nolan, Lynne Overman, J. Carroll Naish, Anthony Quinn, Larry Crabbe, Johnny Downs, Dorothy Peterson, Delmar Watson, Regis Toomey, Louise Miller.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

NO MILLION dollar epic, but it looks it. It seems to be a foregone conclusion in various sectors of Hollywood that any picture budgeted under \$450,000 must not have the benefit of careful direction. To this rigid myth the present offering is a genuine and heartening exception. Director Louis King added some imagination and some sense of dramatic values to a rather tired and overworked theme, and emerges with a Class A picture of the gangster school. Except that *Hunted Men* is different, and this by virtue of touches here and there, color where one least expects to find it, a heightening of suspense, and a laudable absence of plot cliches. The current trend back to the gangster cycle has brought in its wake an unregrettable number of slipshod productions, a number of which it has been my misfortune to cover for the *Spectator*. So that when something comes along to hurrah about, I let down my sleeves and hurrah!

Story Might Be Tighter . . .

THE script by Horace McCoy and William B. Lipman rattles here and there with the occasional noises of over-sentimentality. I liked Lloyd Nolan as a two-fisted gangster who shot his way out of trouble because that was his way. But I couldn't go for him when he sentimentalized with Mary Carlisle or youngster Delmar Watson. Recounting the story of a killer who finds refuge in the bosom of an average American family, forcing his presence on them, the gangster's regeneration seemed a trifle mawkish at times. At the end Nolan's realization that he is a rat and that the family which gave him enforced refuge suffered on his account, forces him to give himself up to the police on a murder charge without resorting to violence. Once before I watched Chester Morris, a rat killer if ever there was one, yield gracefully so that two youngsters might be spared prison terms for a crime that he committed. I remarked then and repeat now that Lucky Luciano was not very chivalrous about anything. In this

sense the script did not ring true and seemed a little loose.

Characterizations Make Up . . .

WHAT *Hunted Men* lacked in story values, however, it had in dramatic values. I think the over-long sequences of excessive heart-pulling between Nolan and Mary Carlisle, and later Delmar Watson, might have been eliminated. Lynne Overman shows an excellent change of pace when he comes to the realization, as father of the family, that the "Charlie" he is harboring is really Joe Albany, the notorious killer. His comic forte is well known, and to him falls the task of bringing all the comedy relief to this picture. He got the most out of a characterization that was not given much in the script. Stock character Number 476A is the gangster underling. To give such a characterization a different twist is a major accomplishment. This Anthony Quinn does. I have seen him quite often in pictures, wondered at all times why he was never given a part equal to his apparent ability. J. Carroll Naish is one of my favorite screen heels, and anything I say in his favor will be overtly prejudiced. He is a victim, I believe, of type casting, which means that to him fall the heavy roles with a uniformity that is discouraging. I remember his one sympathetic part in a picture the title of which escapes me. His Mexican "papacito," a sympathetic character, was one of the finest things I had seen on the screen for many a moon.

Another Jones-Hardy Family? . . .

JOHNNY DOWNS had but a few moments on the screen, yet his presence on the screen made itself felt. His exuberance shot across the celluloid at the audience in no uncertain terms. The thought occurs to me that if Paramount is searching for its own Hardy-Jones Family epic, they might do well enough with the present family, Lynne Overman, Dorothy Peterson, Mary Carlisle, Delmar Watson and prospective son-in-law Johnny Downs. Dorothy Peterson gave a warm performance as the mother terrorized by the knowledge that she is forced to harbor a gangster in the midst of her family. Mary Carlisle grew up convincingly from the rather sophomoric sort of juvenile into the woman under Lloyd Nolan's influence. I liked Sourpuss Louise Miller as the family maid. Screen maids are never human because they do their work so amiably and willingly. Victor Milner has given *Hunted Men* some careful camera work. His "backyard" exteriors are masterfully done, and the photography is clear and clean at all times. The wooded glen sequences were tastefully executed as well. The sets by A. E. Freudeman are authentic without being lavish. His exteriors were particularly tastefully done. Film Editor Anne Bauchens did a good piece of work and in spots made the picture move along with the kind of pacing it obviously needs.

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MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

APROPOS OF UNICORNS . . .

JAMES GIBBONS HUNEKER called one of his fascinating collection of essays *Unicorns*. In the opening chapter he deals with those extraordinary creatures. Hunecker recalls how in that golden book of wit and wisdom, *Through the Looking Glass*, the Unicorn rather disdainfully remarks that he had believed children to be fabulous monsters. Alice smilingly retorts: "Do you know, I always thought Unicorns were fabulous monsters, too? I never saw one alive before." "Well, now that we have seen each other," said the Unicorn, "if you'll believe in me, I'll believe in you. Is that a bargain?" Said Alice: "Yes, if you like." This, of course, is not exactly the gist of introductory conversation Dmitri Tiomkin and I had the other day, but I still feel somewhat like Alice upon entering a studio, everyone of them a kind of "wonderland" with lots of Unicorns in captivity. As a matter of fact, Composer Tiomkin does not give himself any unicornian airs, although he must wield some fabulous power, for it is said that MGM is spending enough money on the music for *The Great Waltz* to finance a whole B picture. At any rate, it should prove an A score, based on the Tiomkin-revised music of Johann Strauss, the waltz king. Toscha Seidel has been brought West for the soli and oligati. La Korjus from Berlin warbles the coloratura. A number of episodes heard and seen are played by an orchestra of some 90 of the best players here. Some fifteen immensely valuable old violins, violas and cellos have been rented for a string unit heard in special sequences. Mr. Tiomkin has things fabulously his own way, aided and abetted by MGM's music chief, Nathaniel Finston, and Producer Heyman.

From Soldiers to Saints . . .

TIOMKIN'S first important score was that to *The Road Back*, but the rumor has it that it was "shot to pieces" and much of the best was cut out in Universal's scissor room to make room for battle and battle noise. Next, he wrote music for *Lost Horizon*, and Columbia allowed him to translate into sound the spiritual conception of life as conceived by a Tibetan saint in the flesh. It was a difficult score to achieve. Now he is compiling, in part re-writing and blending the most charming bits from Johann Strauss' known and unknown compositions. And there are many greatly appealing items among the nearly 500 pieces by the younger Strauss of the waltz. Incidentally, Tiomkin has decided to forego the use of the *Blue Danube* waltz. Instead the *Tales from the Vienna Woods* form, if I may put it that way, the musical and human key theme for this dance-framed screen tale of the life of Johann Strauss. Tiomkin genuinely believes in the artistic future of film music. "When I appeared as piano soloist on the opening program of WOR, now one of New York's foremost radio stations, I was criticized for

'lowering my standing as an artist.' Some holier-than-thou-people say the same thing about being a 'Hollywood composer.' " Tiomkin smiled: "I think I am in very, very good company and I am sure more good and more important composers will come to write music for films."

Creating a Precedent . . .

WELL aware is Tiomkin of the problems of reproduction, from the recording stage on to the hundreds and thousands of theatres throughout the world. "The dubbing room technicians are often blamed unjustly. In fact, quite often they do very well, but they are expected to gauge acoustic conditions of every 'size,' so to speak, while they work in a room hardly large enough for a small preview audience. Douglas Shearer, MGM's chief of the sound department, is working out a plan by which reproduction machines in every first-run theatre showing *The Great Waltz* will be acoustically regulated in proper relation to existing acoustic properties of these individual houses, as well as with regard to recording details achieved by him in his production which would be lost without proper manipulation of reproduction machines." MGM is thus creating a precedent, I believe singular in the annals of the sound film. And while it will be a costly and difficult task, Shearer and Tiomkin will earn the thanks of numerous musicians and of numberless listeners. The next step, of course, would be to give the composer a certain control over the choice of dynamics in the dubbing room. The other problem Tiomkin points out would be to inspect, repair, modernize or if possible replace out-of-date sound reproduction machines in the theatres. "The composer then would know that he is writing for an instrument of definite possibilities," Tiomkin mused, "but, of course, to unify and standardize sound production in America alone is a colossal task. However, it could be done, and, I am convinced the public and press would appreciate it."

Rushing the Composer . . .

TIOMKIN knows fairly well "the" public, having concertized for years, and the *Lost Horizon* score brought him a huge amount of mail, foreign as well as American. I can well believe that he has studied these letters. He knows, too, what he wishes to say, but he appears to give every sentence a bit of last-minute scrutiny before he speaks. It is as if he were intellectually "clocking" his "rushes" once more before showing them to me. "There is so much to consider," he remarked. "Take the time element. It is perhaps easier to find a spot of music which shall be only 46 seconds long and still be musical. That can be done. We no longer think in terms of modulations only, modern dance music has made the public amenable to rather sudden harmonic transitions. No, the composer's problem is not to provide music in

quantity of seconds. The problem still is of writing long sections of a score in 46 hours." He laughed softly and made a gesture of despair. Then we talked of dramatic and musical continuity. "Time has passed when a film composer need restrict himself thematically. Themes or melodies and even motto-chords or character-harmonies can be tried musically. Of course, they should be developed also psychologically. Orchestration, too, should be guided by dramatic-psychologic reasons. But music has moved ahead tremendously in Hollywood in the last few years. One man has done more to bring about a quick change than any other." I looked at him questioningly. Tiomkin said quietly: "Stokowski . . . of course."

Lesson from a Concert . . .

HOLLYWOOD, from producers to the last sound-man, learned a lesson from Stokowski's treatment of instrumental color on the acoustically equipped stage of the Pan-American Auditorium during the 1935 visit of the Philadelphia symphony, Dmitri Tiomkin said. "The next lesson came from his multi-channel recording of the Bach fugue in Paramount's first *Big Broadcast* film. Instruments and instrumental timbre were elevated to the rank of *dramatis personae*. . . . There is not a serious musician in Hollywood now, not a good recording engineer, who does not have that sound in his ears. You are ashamed if you do not get the best. Worse, you feel frustrated if you go to a theatre and hear the strange noises which are but a distortion of what has been achieved in the studio by everyone giving his best. . . . I believe musical shorts will be one way to work out perfect recording. . . . Another problem is that of a really satisfactory sound stage with complete equipment. There should be at least one such stage and one superlative recording orchestra formed from the best players of every studio and available to all of them. Of course, MGM has gone a long way already in this direction in the present production of *The Great Waltz* by bringing in outstanding guest players from other studios and the Philharmonic Orchestra. My friend, Douglas Shearer, has installed a multi-channel recording system, in which four men are monitoring thirteen microphones." The purpose, as Tiomkin explained, is not merely that of balance.

Farewell to the Unicorn . . .

TIOMKIN spoke up again after some passing attention to his hasty luncheon: "Balance—is there a word used more frequently and with less acute meaning? I think it was Toscanini who made America more balance-conscious than any other conductor. Now we are suffering from a balance-mania. I also believe in balance, but I also believe with Stokowski in the dramatic, psychological plastic use of tone color as generated by individual instruments or individual sections or combinations of instruments within an ensemble. Instrumental tone color should be nuanced within an orchestra just as an actor varies the inflections of his voice for reasons of dramatic

innuendo. The best example is the speech choir, a dramatic art not yet realized fully in this country. In the speech choir voice timbres are assorted, and 'blended' if you like, as in a string quartet. We have done something of that order in the multi-channel recording in the present production of *The Great Waltz*. But there is little purpose in talking about it. Will you come some time and listen to it, if you are not too busy?"

And the conversation ended. I thought again of Alice and the Unicorn, who had pledged mutual belief in each other. I must look up my volume of Carroll to see how Alice fared. In due course, I hope to visit again Composer Tiomkin and his fellow-unicorns at MGM to verify with my own ears how unicorns in this particular wonderland "go on record."

ECHOES OUR SENTIMENTS . . .

WRITES Ed Durling, the sage of column one, section two, *Los Angeles Times*: "Hollywood is going in for series pictures in a large way. If some producer makes a series of good old-fashioned love stories he will clean up financially. Majority of women don't care for these films that wisecrack so much about love. About two a year is all they care of these, but they can look at the old-fashioned kind every night and never get tired." And to that, we would say that Ed has said a mouthful.

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JUST learned that one of the rugs in Jack Benny's new home is to have a morning-glory design. No doubt there will be more than "six" colors, but I am sure they will all be "delicious" because the rugs are being made in the plant where I earn my daily bread and butter. I shall have a particular interest in seeing them when they are finished, due to the fact that Jack Benny and his radio associates add zest to my life.

* * *

AVIATOR'S lament: I know a whole lot about flying; I can sail through the air without trying. But when it comes to a girl I get all in a whirl and spend the hours in sighing—the dear little, sweet little, darn little daylight saving hours in sighing! All my plans are busted; my plans with hope encrusted, that Cupid's dart would find her heart but the darn kid can't be trusted—the dear little, sweet little, cute little, darn little Cupid can't be trusted!

* * *

ROBERT JOSEPH tells me Mehitable, his dizzy blond girl friend, is not as dumb as he thinks, and proceeds to prove it. It would be nice if the film industry realized that motion picture patrons are not as dumb as it things.

* * *

TO ADD a little more fuel to the fire Bert Harlen and I have been trying to kindle for a picture having to do with the Bachs: Ambrosius Bach (Sebastian's father) had a twin brother who looked so much like him that not even their respective wives could tell them apart, and they fiddled and composed so much alike that it is impossible to say who composed what. There, it would seem, is another chance for one of those brief little touches that would help to overcome the "highbrow" curse.

* * *

SAW a musical short that might have been very good indeed, but wasn't, because of sloppy directing. The story had to do with the Canadian Mounties, than which there is no more colorful subject; the quality of the male voices singing the chorus parts was excellent, and with a little care in directing the musical could have been made quite worthwhile. One really fine part was an Indian chant with tom-toms. But the baritone hero, although he had a good voice, had no screen personality, and therefore should have been kept in the background while his voice did the work. It is quite possible to put things across with the magic of a good voice. Then, as a crowning bit of idiocy, when the bridal couple started down the aisle under the crossed swords of the Mounties, the baritone bridegroom was made to sing a love song of some sort, and sing it fortissimo. I

could not decide whether it was supposed to be a sort of salute to future happiness or a lament for lost freedom, but whatever the idea was, it was not fair to the baritone.

* * *

WENT to see *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* because I am very keen about Gary Cooper and Claudette Colbert, but I was prepared to be merely tolerant of the screwy story. However, I forgot to be tolerant because I forgot that the story was screwy. That, I assume, would be due to the "Lubitsch touch" that Mr. Beaton writes about. And I made the interesting discovery that there is a certain type of picture that will carry a musical accompaniment rather than a musical background (but such pictures are very rare), and *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* is of that type. One is conscious of the music and glad of it, and that is because someone with innate musicianship, a keen sense of humor and of the fitness of things, is responsible for the musical setting. Whose touch would that be, I wonder? Borris Morros'?

* * *

JASCHA HEIFETZ, speaking of radio, has said: "In Europe the broadcasters set out to instruct or improve the public taste. In America the public has improved the taste of the broadcasters." Now, if the public will turn its attention to the film industry! Or has it?

* * *

GOOD NEWS: That Walt Disney intends to have Dopey, Doc and the five other little men make a second screen appearance, this time in a short.

* * *

ATTENTION, motion picture producers! Tea is supplanting the cocktail! Discriminating hostesses, so we are told, take pride in serving tea correctly. Screen scenes showing tea being served—perhaps before an open fire—will be a delightful change, and the film industry will have to be careful that cocktail party scenes are used only when the story calls for some of the quaint old customs of the cocktail era.

* * *

WONDER if those band leaders in the current musical shorts are supposed to be exemplifying masculine charm? Anyway, I'll take Mickey Rooney.

* * *

ON MY way to work this morning I found that some friend, or friends, had broken over more than half of a row of young maples, extending about a half mile. The tops of the trees were hanging down with the leaves wilted. A dead tree had been left standing straight.

* * *

I'D LIKE to write a poem about the gentle Spring—about May flowers and April showers and birds and everything. But when I would a paeon sing about the bursting buds, the lines I write with hopes so bright, all turn out to be duds.

* * *

DREAM of affluence: To market, to market to buy a fine steak! Home again, home again—why must I wake?

BELOW THE WASTE

By Don Quixote

SEVERAL months ago an imperial caravan traced a trail of dust across the continent. And presently into Hollywood rolled His Imperial Highness, Prince Michael Oblensy Romanoff, also known as Harry Gerguson. The family crest, a hooked thumb quartered on a field of gules to denote the time-honored means of travel of this portion of the Romanoff clan, was proudly emblazoned on the Prince's luggage. Reliable authorities, close to the editors of the *Almanac de Gotha*, report the royal chap was down to pretzel sticks, popcorn and water. Which means he was an habitue of the best cocktail bars, with a somewhat depleted imperial exchequer. However, bar peanuts are a form of subsistence, as many an extra will readily testify. A local columnist noted some months later that the Prince was sporting a blue Ford V-8 convertible coupe with white side-wall tires, and an occasional tankful of Kno-knox gasoline. The recession was a myriad of truth only for the Hollywood plebians. The Russian Five Month Plan was in full evidence, and completely successful.

Then a Picture . . .

TO FOLLOW the Prince's good fortune might read like something out of Grimm. Smiled upon by Fate in the person of Producer Maurice Conn, the Prince was signed to a minor part in *Sing While You're Able*. He proved a better Prince than an actor. Now we have no quarrel with any man who makes a living, for the writer knows well the fiscal vicissitudes of this hard and practical world. And we do not even give a shriek of terror when an advertising model is assigned to a stellar role, when a delicatessen store clerk is signed as a director, or when a butcher is placed in charge of film production. So that the news that His Imperial Highness was awarded with a "Gregory Ratoff" three-way contract as writer-actor-director, leaves us a little cold. In our wisdom we have learned to expect all things of all men.

Lese Majeste . . .

HOWEVER, the etiquette of royalty is presently to be smacked in the puss, so to speak. The writer rears on its hind legs when it learns that Prince Mike is shortly to become Court Jester to Darryl I. This is an insult to all the best blood of royal Europe. It is not of any importance that exhibitors throughout the country are going to wonder how the hell a picture like *Ellis Island* rates the kind of budget it got. It must be remembered, of course, that the Prince has more than a nodding acquaintance with that piece of insularity through the hospitality of the immigration officials who pointed it out to him on occasion. But this will hardly be of interest to the poor sucker in Meadow-

ville who has to pay and play for *Ellis Island* and any of the other imperial effusions. Nevertheless, such a thought fades into nothingness compared to the lese majeste committed by making the Prince a Court Jester.

Let 'em Eat Cake . . .

NO DOUBT the Prince makes a wonderful buffoon and adds zest to the court sessions of the good king. That he makes a fine stooge many a Broadway columnist will readily testify. But why should Don Quixote or anyone else for that matter be concerned? As long as *le rois s'amuse* what difference to anybody? Well, for some reason or other the *Spectator* has dedicated itself to the welfare of the film industry. It feels that the industry's problems are its problems. When the industry rejoices, it rejoices. So that when Don Quixote sees the spectacle of an incompetent placed in high office, perhaps as a joke, perhaps in all seriousness, then he should make some sort of comment. For all this fun-making is somewhat reminiscent. Reminiscent of the days of Queen Marie Antoinette when she told the starving multitudes to eat cake. Motion picture making should not give way to stooging as one of the fine arts. Even if Prince Mike is a capital fellow and makes the king laugh when cigars explode in his face and he sits down on a tack, film making still has some serious aspects.

Le Grand Monarche . . .

LOUIS XIV used to make a grand tour of his realm from time to time, bringing with him his entire court of sycophantic noblemen. His trip was somewhat of a burden to the people of France as he made his way across the country, for le Grand Monarche was forced to live off the land as he went. Presently our own good king is about to make a tour with a retinue of twenty-five or more. He will not live off the land, of course, but should he visit Laughing Gulch, New Mexico, he may hear from Joe Alvarez, the exhibitor of the Astrallita Theatre. And Joe doesn't mince words at all. He says just what he thinks. And Joe will point out in no uncertain terms that he is paying too much for certain pictures. He will also indicate just why those certain pictures have high production budgets.

It's All a Gag, Fellers . . .

SUPPOSE it's all a gag. Then the joke is a pretty sour one at best. For if Prince Mike is given a responsible position just for fun, then the spectacle is not one to laugh at. And it will not be funny to consider that Jean Hersholt is trying to scrape money together for indigents while incompetents pelt each other with caviar. If the Prince is drawing down the reputed salary in four figures, then many an unemployed director and production manager will have little reason to smile. And imagine for a moment that the whole thing is just a great big publicity story. Well, sometimes this kind of publicity can explode in someone's face. All around it ain't funny.

EASILY PURCHASED PLEASURE . . .

FORTUNATE is the person in a position to extend a helping hand to one who needs it. Charity bestows more on the person who extends it than on the recipient. Wrote one of the Biblical philosophers, "Though I have all faith so that I could move mountains, and have not charity, I have nothing." The personnel of the motion picture industry is fortunate in the possession of an organized outlet for their charitable impulses. The Motion Picture Relief Fund is theirs. For the materially fortunate it adds to their good fortune by providing an opportunity to give with wisdom and to the less fortunate it presents an opportunity to receive with discretion. Owing to the thoughtlessness of some of those whose privilege it is to give and whose resources make generosity possible, the Fund at times lacks the money to meet all the legitimate demands upon it. That is not a condition screen people should allow to exist. The money they give is for their own people, and except for the grace of God the potential givers might be in the place of those in need. The Fund has to sell used postage stamps to replete its treasury. That is not something of which the personnel of the film industry has reason to be proud.

Hollywood **SPECTATOR**

10 CENTS

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—June 4, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 8

We Take Issue with Zanuck's Contention That
Only Expensive Films Will Pay

Rockefeller Foundation Undertakes Survey of
Interest to Motion Picture Makers

F. Hugh Herbert Comments on Public Statement
of a Fellow Screen Writer

Bruno David Ussher Claims Music Provides the
Screen with Another Dimension

... REVIEWS ...

ALEXANDER'S RAGTIME BAND ★ WHITE BANNERS ★ JOSETTE
YOU AND ME ★ MYSTERIOUS MR. MOTO ★ TWO GUN JUSTICE

ONLY PUBLICATION IN THE WORLD DEVOTED
EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM



From the EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

DARRYL ZANUCK'S IDEAS . . .

BEFORE he left for Europe Darryl Zanuck settled all screen problems in an interview he gave *Variety* (N. Y.). The present box-office depression, he stated, is not due to the kind of pictures Hollywood is making, the reason for it being that the public lacks money enough to patronize any but the biggest pictures. But let us hear from him directly: "The record shows that the general public just hasn't as much money for film entertainment as it had a year ago. If all films were suffering at this time there might be some truth in the 'strike' argument, but the fact is that hit pictures are drawing bigger than any time in the past five years. The public is shopping, the fan is selecting his 'must' pictures and paying to see them. He is forced to pass up less attractive films." Darryl goes on to say that Sonja Henie's *Happy Landing* will gross \$1,800,000 in this country alone and that *In Old Chicago* will do better than that. In the next *Variety* column there is another article in which it is stated that Walt Disney's *Snow White* will gross \$3,500,000 in this country alone. One thing the *Spectator* has urged so often its readers must be tired of its repetition, is that when seeking screen entertainment the public wants personalities, not actors. *Happy Landing* is not a big picture, but it has in Sonja Henie a big personality.

Why "Snow White" Clicks . . .

ANOTHER claim the *Spectator* has made repeatedly is that when an audience gathers in a film theatre it desires to exercise its imagination, not its intellect. That is a fundamental of screen art, but one never gets far in Hollywood by urging recognition of the fundamentals of the art which has built its industry. *Snow White* happens to prove conclusively the *Spectator's* contention regarding the imagination. All its appeal is to our imaginations. If we permit our intellects to function while we are viewing it, we would find it too silly to hold us in our seats for five minutes. Yet, if I read Darryl aright, he thinks the cost of a picture is what attracts the public. He says his company will spend \$3,500,000 more this year than it did last for the same number of pictures. As a prophet my batting average is high, but I am willing to risk it by declaring that Century is going to get nothing for its extra three-and-a-half millions. The public cannot be stunned into attend-

ing film theatres. The big picture today is doing well when it returns its own cost. Tomorrow's bigger picture will not do that much and also make a contribution to the deficit formed by all the carelessly made little pictures. Only motion pictures will solve motion picture problems, and producers do not seem to know what a motion picture is.

* * *

ACTORS' GUILD SHOULD ACT . . .

AN ACTRESS who has been on the stage fifty years and has had no experience in pictures, is brought out here by plane to work in a Metro production. On the rolls of the Motion Picture Relief Fund are perhaps two score actresses who have given their best years to the screen and anyone of whom could play the part assigned to the stranger from the stage. And the Actors' Guild, which prates of the good service it is doing its members, sits idly by and permits such injustice to be done. Producers, themselves lacking motion picture knowledge, do not think such knowledge need be part of the equipment for one seeking motion picture employment. The Guild cannot prevent producers importing players, but it can establish a rule that such players must be members of its organization—not a stage guild—for six months, or even twelve months, before appearing before a Hollywood camera. The Guild has done much to improve working conditions for its members. It is time it did something for their careers.

* * *

ROCKEFELLER FUND WANTS TO KNOW . . .

DAILY VARIETY recently contained the following bit of news: "Rockefeller Foundation has granted a special fund to the school of Public and International Affairs of Princeton University, to probe reasons why *One Man's Family* airshow has held its outstanding popularity record for the past six years. Edgar L. Newhouse, III, of Princeton's office of radio research, will conduct the survey through a series of interviews with radio listeners. No announcement was made as to what the survey is expected to prove." Although not undertaken for the purpose, the survey, if Newhouse the Third gets anywhere with it, will prove that the *Spectator* has been of great service to the film industry in carrying on so long and so persistently a campaign for less noise in screen talking and dialogue carried on in conversa-

tional tones. I was reading one evening recently with the radio tuned to a musical program. I became conscious after a while that the music had stopped and talking had begun. I was about to turn off the radio when one of the voices asked a question and I waited for the answer. For the full half hour I listened to the program and at the end discovered it was *One Man's Family*. While I listened I became aware that the story was a serial, as it constantly referred to persons and incidents with which the listener was supposed to be familiar. It was all Greek to me, but I listened. If I get *Variety's* news correctly, some of the Rockefeller money is to be spent in an effort to find out why I listened, and why you, perhaps, listen to the same broadcast.

Manner of Telling Important . . .

TO START with, the dialogue is easy to listen to. I felt as if I were a guest in the home of some pleasant people whose life was much the same as my own. It was not a family of actors playing parts—just a family of ordinary people discussing their domestic affairs in a quiet, homey manner, indulging in good-natured banter, with no raised voices and no lack of respect by the young people for their elders. As I have stated, I was unaware of the story significance of what was said, but I listened to the end and enjoyed my visit with the family. The listening was physically pleasant; the voices did not assault my ears, and the performances were perfect because they were completely natural. As I have claimed scores of times in the *Spectator*, any story told on the screen with the same degree of naturalness, with the same lack of suggestion of acting and unnecessarily raised voices, will hold the attention of an audience. I did not continue to listen to prove my theory about screen talking; I listened because I was being entertained, and not until I read the *Variety* item did I think of it in relation to motion pictures. I do not know what story the complete series of broadcasts is telling, but I do know that no story told in the manner in which most stories are told on the screen could be told for six years and still hold its audience. It is the manner of telling which keeps the feature alive, and the same manner would give renewed life to the film industry if the producers of its pictures had brains enough to realize it.

* * *

GOULDING'S CAMERA TECHNIQUE . . .

WHEN you see *White Banners*—a picture which under no circumstances must you miss seeing—note the manner in which Edmund Goulding uses his camera. He is a director who understands his medium in relation to its audience. In any dialogue scene in which the players are talking the story, we people out in front are interested more in what is being said than in what we are looking at. In close shots the camera brings us into the immediate presence of the players. It is as if we are in the room with them, listening to what they are saying. We see their faces as they speak. If one of them turns his back on us while he still is talking, we do not

move around him to keep his face in sight; we already know what he looks like, and are interested only in what he is saying. We can hear him just as well when he turns his back to us as when he faces us. But nearly all Hollywood directors proceed on the theory that we must see the face of a speaker, a mistaken theory which leads to jumpy film cutting and visually disturbing short shots. Eddie Goulding in his direction of *White Banners* permits us to keep our places in relation to the players, there being no cut to the face of a speaker when he turns his back on us. In one scene a table is between the camera and the players as they read their lines. While the dialogue proceeds, the two players turn around, seat themselves on the table, go on with what they are saying while we see only their backs. The usual technique would call for a reverse shot keeping the camera on the faces, or—from the audience standpoint—making the audience change its position to hear what it already could hear without moving. In a picture there should be no cut which can be avoided. Goulding knows how to avoid them. (My review of *White Banners* will be found on page 7.)

* * *

WHY DRAG US IN? . . .

WHEN I saw the letter was from F. Hugh Herbert, my screen-writer friend with whom I have wordy quarrels we both enjoy, I assumed he was starting another one with me. But this time he is after another scalp. It would be selfish of me to keep such a good letter to myself: "Dear Welford: Did you, by any chance, see the astounding welter of facts notarized by Inez L. Bowser (whose commission expires February 4, 1942), appearing in the local trade papers under the signature of James Kevin McGuinness (whose contract expires—when)? It is, I believe, one of the most amazing documents ever to come out of Hollywood. Mind you, I do not blame the *Reporter* or *Variety* for publishing it at space rates. On the contrary, I think that if Mr. McGuinness is fatuous enough to pay for it, they would be suckers not to accept it.

Hugh Is Deeply Moved . . .

I AM barely acquainted with Mr. McGuinness, but I am so deeply moved by his statistics that I feel a special award of some sort should be made to him—possibly by the Academy. If there are no 'Oscars' available, I personally will be happy to contribute from my private collection a very fine, antique, hand-painted moustache cup. If you care to sponsor this award, I will be glad to have it known as the *Spectator* Challenge Cup, to be given annually for the most conspicuous example of bad taste and lack of professional dignity in connection with motion pictures. I am satisfied that Mr. McGuinness, as a result of his advertisement, will hold the trophy unchallenged for many years.

Full Statistics Lacking . . .

THE statistics quoted by Mr. McGuinness are, I regret to see, incomplete. Perhaps you could prevail upon him to inform us, at space rates, on a

number of points which would be of general interest. Of the four collaborators, for instance, who talked the loudest? And the longest? Who counted the lines of dialogue? How many semicolons were used—and who thought of them? I really feel that if a script is to be analyzed meticulously, that we are entitled to allocate each word and punctuation mark. As a matter of fact, I, myself, mislaid a couple of commas when I was lunching at MGM some weeks ago. I strongly suspect that Mr. McGuinness may have used one or both. To the endless saga of Hollywood inanities, I believe that Mr. McGuinness has contributed a deathless page which should be imbedded in the cement of Grauman's Chinese Theatre, so that future generations may see to what heights of asininity grown, literate men can rise when they become screen playwrights. Sincerely, F. HUGH HERBERT. *Notarized (in a way) by Blanche Carroll. My Commission Expired MONTHS ago—can you IMAGINE!"*

* * *

ONE OF HOLLYWOOD'S WAYS . . .

THE departure of the Zanucks for Europe was the occasion of an elaborate all-night social function, costing some thousands of dollars. The Motion Picture Relief Fund still needs money badly.

* * *

LOVE SCENE WAS SHOT ONCE . . .

WHEN Errol Flynn in *Robin Hood* leads Olivia de Havilland through a Saxon camp and shows her suffering victims of Norman tyranny, then takes her to the bank of a stream which flows through Sherwood Forest, there is staged one of the tenderest and most convincing love scenes there has been on the screen in some time. In discussing it with a Warner executive I made the interesting discovery that the scene was not rehearsed and is a one-take scene. The two players ran over their lines until they were letter-perfect, went into the scene, it was shot but once and comes to the screen as a demonstration of the directorial technique often used by William Keighley who co-directed *Robin Hood* with Mike Curtiz, technique founded on the conviction that the screen is not an acting art, not an art of projecting emotions as a stage actor must project his to reach his audience, but an act of feeling a part, of becoming the person played and permitting the camera to convey the feeling to the audience. That is a conviction which the *Spectator* has exploited for all of its dozen years. Flynn and Olivia did not rehearse the scene until they knew every bit of action as one knows the multiplication table; they absorbed it until they got the full meaning, then went into it and were unconscious of the physical movement which accompanied their speeches. And because they were alone in the woods and were living the scene, they spoke quietly, gently, without giving a thought to the fact that they were doing so. If Bill Keighley had told them how to sit down, how to get up, how to speak their lines—all things so many directors do—their enactment of the scene, instead of being their own, would have been their individual conceptions of the man-

ner in which the director wanted it done, and they probably would have gone through it eight or ten times before they suited him. I believe in Bill's method of handling experienced talent. The film business is one of selling personalities to the public, and players should be given latitude to express theirs on the screen, not be forced to express their director's.

* * *

JUST ANOTHER I-TOLD-YOU-SO . . .

FOUR years ago, in course of a talk I made at a luncheon in New York attended by well known writers, playwrights and others distinguished for their ability to express themselves in various art forms, I predicted that Hollywood eventually would be the cultural capital of the world. That seemed to amuse my audience. Some weeks ago Edwin Schallert wrote in *Los Angeles Times*: "Fulfillment of the destiny of Southern California as a new world capital of culture is a practical idea that is bound ultimately to see realization, in the opinion of Max Reinhardt, international personality of the art world, around whom revolves a movement that has been launched to create here a great center for festival productions of the stage and an elaborate workshop of the arts and the theatre."

* * *

STARS AND THEIR STORIES . . .

ONE failing producers have is their inability to learn from experience. They are obsessed with the belief that star names mean more at the box-office than stories. I will let Pete Harrison, the picture-wise publisher of *Harrison's Reports*, extend the argument. He writes: "MGM had a sad experience once with a picture that had six stars in it—*Night Flight*, because it had no story. The six stars were the following: Clark Gable, Robert Montgomery, Myrna Loy, John Barrymore, Lionel Barrymore and Helen Hayes, all at the height of their popularity at that time. Yet the picture flopped, even though it was produced on a lavish scale. Further evidence that the story is the thing is the fact that many a star's popularity has been ruined by poor story material. A producer needs players who will draw people to the box-office, but above all he needs persons who know how to choose good stories—who know a good story from a bad one, and who have a full idea of the value of characterizations."

* * *

ONE DOG AND HER DAY . . .

THE fact that an old dog was going to die was deemed to have sufficient appeal to warrant its telegraphing to newspapers in every state in the Union and every province in Canada. And when the dog died, that news also was sent out on all the Associated Press wires. Duddy, the first Seeing-Eye dog, had finished her work. "With only a short time to live," read the first dispatch from New York, "now old and enfeebled, the animal which for ten years had guided her master faithfully and faultlessly through crowded street traffic in strange cities, arrived by plane from Chicago en route to the Seeing-

Eye school at Morristown, New Jersey. Throughout the flight Buddy remained at the feet of her master." It was a first-page story in the *Los Angeles Times* in which I read it, and in genuine human interest it dwarfed all the rest of the news in the paper that morning. It took Hollywood more than the ten years' span of Buddy's faithful work to realize the screen story possibilities of the Seeing-Eye project, and it is eight years since the *Spectator* first suggested it as motion picture material. Film producers proceed on the belief that we are interested more in gangsters than we are in dogs. If Buck, the St. Bernard who is my favorite screen actor, appeared in three well made pictures a year, he could give Shirley Temple stiff competition for top box-office honors. The only people who do not know that are motion picture producers.

* * *

SOME SCREEN PRECEPTS . . .

A FILM producer's equipment for his job should be, 1) Knowledge of people; 2) Knowledge of pictures. There is no box-office substitute for screen art, and no one in pictures is greater than the medium.

* * *

SHOULD PRODUCE OWN LITERATURE . . .

SURELY by this time the film industry has grown great enough to produce its own literature. All the fiction writers in the country are out for motion picture money, and they know the way to get the most of it is first to express themselves in other mediums, short stories, novels or stage plays. An announcement that hereafter Hollywood would purchase only story material written directly for it, would bring the best writers in the world to Hollywood and effect an enormous saving in story costs. Producers should have sense enough to know that. But as I advanced the same argument in a *Spectator* in October, 1926, and at various times since without getting anywhere with it, I suppose things will go on as they are now until we have producers who really know the business they are in. For the \$255,000 RKO has tied up in a New York play, and the cost of having it prepared for the screen, it could purchase a full season's story material written in the first instance in scenario form and necessitating little revision expense to prepare it for shooting. No other form of fiction writing is as simple or as easy to learn as that of writing for the screen, and the best contemporary authors soon would be writing directly for the screen if they knew it was the only way to get screen money.

* * *

BOOMING THE RED INK MARKET . . .

WRITES Louella Parsons: "The greatest drive in the history of motion pictures is now being waged to bring stage talent to Hollywood. . . . If the film producers have their way, there won't be a worthwhile actor left on Broadway, so great is the interest in any player who has achieved any sort of success." Just another blunder being committed by

incompetents who draw enormous salaries on the assumption that they know something about motion pictures. If they had such knowledge they would know they should recruit their acting talent among people with personalities and without stage training which has developed technique which must be forgotten before they can be of value to motion pictures. Raiding the New York stage and ignoring all the demands of the screen as a medium of expression, rapidly are bringing the film industry to its knees and causing exhibitors great concern, yet the brainless blunderers go right ahead, hastening the day when only red ink will be used in balancing the books of film producing companies.

* * *

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

THINGS are in a pretty state in the garden! Something certainly will be done about it! Just because he has a family in the pepper tree above the Golden Emblem rose vine, no mocking bird, when I am cutting a rose, can peck me on the head and get away with it. . . . An air of expectancy pervades our place; a blessed event is imminent; it is about time for Sophie's flock of little quackless ducks to break through their shells. . . . On a quiet Sunday morning he came along our dirt road; old, the world would call him; his pace leisurely; he paused to admire the rose vine which serves as screen between our front garden and our dirt road; I hailed him and he showed me how I should cut my roses, always down to four or five inches from the branch, leaving three sets of leaves below the cutting spot; that promotes growth for a later crop of bloom; I asked him in and we sat beneath the locust tree and talked of a lot of things through the smoke of our pipes; he liked my tobacco and I wrote down the mixture for him; he lately has come to the Valley to live, he and his wife, and his garden got started too late for him to have flowers now; after an hour or so he strolled back the way he had come, smoke from a pipeful of my tobacco trailing behind, in each hand a great bunch of flowers I was sending to his wife with the compliments of Mrs. Spectator and me; I did not ask his name, nor he mine. . . . I crave no home on a high hill with a view which looks down on the rest of the world; I prefer what we have, one which sits modestly behind screens of trees and other growing things within our range of vision, which tuck us in with rustles of breezes in the branches of trees and perfume and color of flowers which grow in the garden; when I wish to view a wide, embracing scene, I will climb a mountain or visit a friend who has his home on a hilltop. . . . I give little thought to eating, but I seem to be unable to stop thinking of the cut of roast beef I had at the Beverly Brown Derby one evening recently; I have eaten roast beef at the famous Simpson's in London and at other places noted for it, but can recall nothing to compare with the Derby brand. Must ask Bob Cobb how he manages it. . . . When I think of all the feed I put out for the mocking birds, I get madder at the one which pecked me.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

HIGHLY COMMENDABLE . . .

● **ALEXANDER'S RAGTIME BAND**; 20th-Fox production and release; Darryl F. Zanuck, executive producer; directed by Henry King; lyrics and music by Irving Berlin; associate producer, Harry Joe Brown; screen play by Kathryn Scola and Lamar Trotti; adapted by Richard Sherman; musical direction, Alfred Newman; dances staged by Seymour Felix; photography, Peverell Marley; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Boris Leven; set decoration, Thomas Little; film editor, Barbara McLean; costumes, Gwen Wakeling. Cast: Tyrone Power, Alice Faye, Don Ameche, Ethel Merman, Jack Haley, Jean Hersholt, Helen Westley, John Carradine, Paul Hurst, Wally Vernon, Ruth Terry, Douglas Fowley, Chick Chandler, Eddie Collins, Joseph Crehan, Robert Gleckler, Dixie Dunbar, Joe King, Charles Coleman, Stanley Andrews, Charles Williams, Jane Jones, Otto Fries, Mel Kalish, Grady Sutton, Selmar Jackson, Tyler Brooke, Donald Douglas.

ONE of the better musicals. An advantage it has over all other pictures of the sort is that it definitely is about something. It interprets in music the career of Irving Berlin, weaving a score or more of his outstanding songs into a story which is just strong enough to hold them together and make continuous the interest of the audience. The time covered in the recital is more than a quarter of a century, during which no member of the cast grows older. I offer that remark as evidence of the common sense exercised in making the picture. Our interest lies primarily in the calvalcade of Berlin numbers and in that respect the story is factual. We realize a resort to fiction was necessary to bring in the various facts. The producers merely took the sensible course of going all the way with fiction and refraining from giving us a Tyrone Power with an aged beard and an Alice Faye with a white wig and spectacles. It was permissible license. The songs really are the story, and aging the characters would have diverted our attention from it. Another commendable feature was the resisting of what must have been an impulse to make Irving Berlin a character in the story. His name is not mentioned and we see it but once on a close-up of a phonograph record of one of his songs. Altogether, *Alexander's Ragtime Band* is a highly commendable production with top rating as entertainment.

Direction Displays Good Taste . . .

PRODUCED on a big but not lavish scale, the picture is rich in visual appeal. It is a panorama of changing architectural moods, advancing from the heavily ornate style of three decades ago to the streamlined interiors of today. Restraint is shown in costume designing, the transition from the dresses of yesterday to those of today being more gradual than in the case of the architecture, the idea apparently being to make the women attractive from the first. Still another commendable feature which distinguishes this musical from most of the others in its class, is its freedom from interpolations of extravagant comedy turns to break the continuity of our interest in the story. It is a logical story, picking up in its stride each musical number and fixing it

nicely into place. The picture's smooth progression is due to the fine direction given it by Henry King. He was an admirable choice for the task. A feature of his long and illustrious career as a director has been the good taste he displays in every picture he makes. He has a sensitive touch, a sympathetic understanding of human values, and always presents us with people we like. The love scenes of Alice Faye and Tyrone Power are notable for tenderness and beauty. Equally impressive is the direction of the more lusty scenes, but always the dominant note is good taste.

Tyrone and Alice Pleasing . . .

TO THOSE whose memories stretch back to the beginning of Berlin's career as a song writer, *Alexander's Ragtime Band* will be a reminiscent treat. Each of his notable songs is a landmark in the forward progress of the story, a few in their entirety, some abbreviated snatches of many to fill the picture without overcrowding it—all a series of pleasant memories, each of which was greeted with hearty applause by the distinguished audience which filled the Carthay Circle Theatre at the preview of the picture. Berlin himself was in the audience, and to him it must have been a proud moment. As a tribute to a man who has given so much pleasure to his fellowmen, the picture itself is a graceful gesture and the manner of its initial presentation as graceful a compliment. All the elements of the picture are up to the high standard set by the music which fills it. Tyrone Power—a young man who is coming along amazingly—is ideal casting for the part he plays, that of an ambitious though temperamental orchestra leader. He gives a penetrating, consistent study of the man of moods. Alice Faye's performance is the finest she has given us. In her opening scenes she was so completely the loud, rather vulgar honky-tonk singer that I did not recognize her. Her love for Power and the mellowing influence of increasing prosperity gradually rub off the rough spots and she becomes Alice, the nice girl we know.

All Hands Deserve Praise . . .

BACKING up the two leads there is a well balanced cast, which, thanks to Henry King's good direction, reveals no weak spots. Don Ameche, Ethel Merman, Jack Haley, Jean Hersholt, Helen Westley, John Carradine, Paul Hurst are among those who contribute greatly to the satisfaction the picture will give. Owing to the careless manner in which the sound was controlled when the picture was previewed, the voice of Ethel Merman was given a penetrating quality that made her songs hard to listen to, particularly under the competition provided by the lower and more mellow notes which make Alice Faye such a pleasing songstress. The final song sung by Ethel is just one song too many and mars the picture by virtue of unduly prolonging the final scene which the audience expects before the song is begun. To Bernard Herzbrun and Boris Leven for their outstanding set designing, to Peverell Marley for grand photography, to Gwen Wakeling for

strikingly effective costumes, to Barbara McLean for expert film editing, and to Harry Joe Brown, producer of the picture, who steered the course of the whole enterprise from script to screen, goes praise for their contributions to such a highly successful piece of film entertainment.

MADE GREAT BY TREATMENT . . .

● **WHITE BANNERS:** Warners release of a Cosmopolitan production; producer, Hal B. Wallis; assistant producer, Henry Blanke; screen play, Lenore Coffee, Cameron Rogers and Abem Finkel; original, Lloyd C. Douglas; director, Edmund Goulding; assistant director, Frank Heath; photography, Charles Rosher; music, Max Steiner; editor, Thomas Richards; art direction, John Hughes; sound by Oliver S. Garretson; wardrobe, Milo Anderson; technical advisor, C. A. Miller; musical direction by Leo F. Forbstein. Cast: Claude Rains, Fay Bainter, Jackie Cooper, Bonita Granville, Henry O'Neill, Kay Johnson, James Stephenson, J. Farrell McDonald, William Pawley, Edward Pawley, John Ridgely, Mary Field, Edward McWade.

A **CINEMASTERPIECE**, a rather obvious and quite ordinary story made great as a picture by the treatment given it. Owing to the motion picture industry's policy of selling people instead of pictures, *White Banners* will not attract the audience to which its merits entitle it, as in the cast there are no box-office names to crowd the billboards. And I think its appeal is a bit too intellectual to attain wide popularity, even though its philosophy is expressed in human terms, and in simple, direct language, by one of the best casts ever assembled in a picture. It is another picture which did not evoke audible applause from the preview audience; instead, its running was rewarded with that still, quiet attention which bespeaks a completely absorbed audience. The picture invites no applause; it does not indulge in heroics, does not strive to achieve drama or build to dramatic climaxes. It is a simple tale told simply and in its simplicity lies its strength. It is intensely human, its appeal strictly adult, but by no means heavy. Its people are your neighbors and mine, ordinary run-of-the-mill people living their lives in their own way.

Goulding's Fine Direction . . .

MANY times the *Spectator* has expressed the opinion that practically any story can be made into a satisfying motion picture if it be told in a series of conversations carried on in quiet tones to give them a feeling of intimacy. *White Banners* proves the contention sound. Not a voice is raised, not a word stressed to reach the audience, many speeches, in fact, being delivered in tones so low we wonder at the ability of the microphone to bring them to us so distinctly. The greatest asset a talking picture can have is being easy to listen to. Edmund Goulding's direction of dialogue is based on that thought. *White Banners* for its entire length is one of the most intelligently directed pictures I have seen.* Goulding seemed to be inspired by his story material, and his

inspiration seems to have inspired his players, not one of whom for even a brief moment appears to be a person playing a part. Fay Bainter magnificently portrays an unwed mother whose sorrows have bred in her a Christlike quality which pervades the picture. But she is not a solemn person with a sermon to preach; rather does she live her philosophy in an every-day way, and utters her precepts only at intervals to explain the motive for her actions. Claude Rains is less the actor and more the human being than he has been thus far in his screen appearances. His performance is a brilliant demonstration of intelligent comprehension of the inner meaning of a role.

Kay Johnson Once More . . .

ONE of the pleasantest features of *White Banners* is the presence of Kay Johnson in the cast. Why this personally appealing and exceedingly clever young woman is not seen frequently on the screen is one of those mysteries which can be explained only on the ground of producer stupidity. She has charm which few actresses possess, an easy grace of movement, a musically pitched voice, and keen understanding of the values of a characterization. To-day she would be one of the big box-office favorites if producers had realized the possibilities her early screen appearances demonstrated she possessed. Jackie Cooper is coming along so rapidly that soon we will have to call him John. He contributes a fine performance to *White Banners*, as do also Henry O'Neill and Bonita Granville. In one sequence we have J. Farrell McDonald, an established favorite whom audiences will be glad to see. The screen play is credited to Lenore Coffee, Cameron Rogers and Abem Finkel. I do not know which one is entitled to the most credit for an able piece of screen writing. I liked the way the script got rid of Kay Johnson and Bonita Granville when they had served their purpose. When the remainder of the story did not concern them, we have a sequence at a railroad station showing their departure to pay a visit to a relative. I was sorry to see them go, but I admired the technique revealed by their going. Max Steiner once more demonstrates his skill at composing a sympathetic musical score, and Charles Rosher's photography also is up to the high

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*For further comment on Goulding's direction, see page 3 under heading, "Goulding's Camera Technique."

standard he long since established. To Henry Blanke, the Warner Brothers producer in charge, goes credit for another notable job to add to the long list of his notable successes. . . . And there you have W.B., produced by W.B., reviewed by W.B.

SIMONE IS COMING ALONG . . .

● **JOSETTE**; 20th Century-Fox; associate producer, Gene Markey; director, Allan Dwan; screen play, James Edward Grant; based on play by Paul Frank and George Fraser; from story by Ladislaus Vадnai; music and lyrics, Mack Gordon and Harry Revel; photography, John Mescall; art directors, Bernard Herzbrun and David Hall; film editor, Robert Simpson; musical director, David Buttolph; dances staged by Nick Castle and Geneva Sawyer. Cast: Don Ameche, Simone Simon, Robert Young, Joan Davis, Bert Lahr, Paul Hurst, William Collier, Sr., Tala Birell, Lynn Bari, William Demarest, Ruth Gillette, Armand Kaliz, Ferdinand Gottschalk, Maurice Cass, Lillian Porter.

ON THE whole, rather entertaining. It gives the Simone Simon personality a chance to assert itself, presenting us again with the cute little girl of *Girls' Dormitory*. Without doubt Simone has something the screen can use. Her range is limited, but within it she is unique. In *Josette* she has two songs which give her voice a better chance than it had in *Love and Hisses*, and she makes a hit in each of them. On the merit side of *Josette* is the restraint it reveals in handling Simone. Most leading singing players are given so many songs that we tire of them before the last is sung. Gene Markey, *Josette's* producer, refrains from giving us too much of anything except drunkenness. Don Ameche loves *Josette* as impersonated by Simone. But she is not the real *Josette*. The real one is a golddigger, and when Ameche learns that, and does not know there are two of them, he thinks the girl he loves is after him only for his money. That presents an interesting story situation. What is he going to do about it? We never find out what the normal Ameche would have done. He gets beastly drunk and insults the girl he loves. I can see no screen value in drunkenness, preferring to see a character's normal reaction to a situation in which he finds himself. Paul Hurst is hopelessly drunk in each of his scenes, thus limiting the appeal of his characterization to those in the audience who like to see drunken men. A normal Hurst would have universal appeal.

Bob Young In Happy Role . . .

BOB YOUNG is coming along. His likable personality and marked ability register more strongly with each of his appearances. In *Josette* he has a part which his skill makes seem to have been tailored to his exclusive measure. The mark of a good actor is one who creates the impression that no one else could have played his part so well. Bob always manages to do that. As a debonair, irrepressible, devil-take-the-hindmost young fellow ready to fall in and out of love with the same happy abandon, he has few equals. In fact, at the moment I can think of none. In *Josette* Don Ameche gives his usual suave performance. His technique always is perfect. Joan

Davis rapidly is becoming one of the screen's most irresistible comedienues. She can put more fun into a half dozen words than most of our girls can in a long speech. Her *Josette* performance is a joyous contribution. The clever Tala Birell has a thankless part as the real *Josette*, golddigger, and makes it as disagreeable as it should be. Bert Lahr and Willie Collier, Sr., are most effective. Mack Gordon and Harry Revel are responsible for Simone's two vocal numbers. Each has outstanding merit, but owing to Simone's accent, it was difficult to get all the values of the lyrics. The picture has a smart production and much highly artistic photography. The closing scene will appeal strongly to all those in the audience under four years of age, but the older ones will find it rather silly horseplay.

FAILS TO AROUSE SYMPATHY . . .

● **YOU AND ME**; Paramount; producer-director, Fritz Lang; screen play, Virginia Van Upp; based on story by Norman Krasna; music, Kurt Weill; lyrics, Sam Coslow; photography, Charles Lang, Jr.; art direction, Hans Dreier and Ernest Fegte; film editor, Paul Weatherwax; musical direction, Boris Morros. Cast: Sylvia Sidney, George Raft, Barton MacLane, Harry Carey, Roscoe Karns, George E. Atone, Warren Hymer, Robert Cummings, Adrian Morris, Roger Gray, Cecil Cunningham, Vera Gordon, Egon Brecher, Willard Robertson, Guinn Williams, Bernadene Hayes, Joyce Compton, Carol Paige.

UNWISE selection of story material nullified all the imagination Fritz Lang puts into its direction. A boy and a girl, each on parole, work in a department store whose owner employs released convicts in the hope of reforming them. The two, George Raft and Sylvia Sidney, fall in love with one another; Raft makes a clean breast of his record, Sylvia says nothing about having been in prison or being on parole. They marry; she lies her way out of several tight places. Finally George discovers that Sylvia's record ran parallel with his, that she, also, had been in the penitentiary and is on parole. The blow almost kills him—just why, is one of the mysteries the picture leaves unexplained. He goes back to the old gang and with the members of it is caught in the act of robbing the store owned by the man who had given a job to each of the gangsters. The fundamental weakness of the story is that it fails to awaken our interest in, or sympathy for, any of the characters. Our lack of interest makes the picture seem interminably long.

Fails to Take First Hurdle . . .

LANG, who both produced and directed, introduces some imaginative scenes which might have meant something to others in the preview audience, but which were beyond me. The fact that I did not care what happened to anyone in the picture no doubt was responsible for my inability to grasp what Lang was getting at, as I refused to grapple with a mental problem whose solution was a matter of utter indifference to me. In any picture, the first objective of the director is to interest us in his people, to make us love them or hate them, applaud or hiss them. Lang

tries hard, and presents us with many scenes excellently directed from a technical standpoint, but which do not get under our skin. His direction of dialogue is particularly good. The drab atmosphere of the whole picture and our lack of interest in anything that happens nullify the work of the players. In *Souls At Sea* George Raft proved himself an excellent actor, but here he has a part beyond any actor's ability to make interesting. I never have warmed to any of Sylvia Sydney's screen appearances, and to none less than this one. Paramount provided an adequate production, and technically the picture has merit. The large preview audience sat through it to the end. Whether that signified content with what was happening or hope that something more interesting would happen, I do not know.

MR. MOTO ACQUIRES STAMINA . . .

● **MYSTERIOUS MR. MOTO:** 20th Century-Fox; executive producer, Sol M. Wurtzel; director, Norman Foster; original screen play, Phillip MacDonald and Norman Foster; based on the character "Mr. Moto," created by J. P. Marquand; photography, Virgil Miller; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Lewis Creber; film editor, Norman Colbert; musical director, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Peter Lorre, Mary Maguire, Henry Wilcoxon, Erik Rhodes, Harold Huber, Leon Ames, Forrester Harvey, Fredrik Vogeding, Lester Matthews, John Rogers, Karen Sorrell, Mitchell Lewis.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

AT LAST Mr. Moto has assumed a virility in keeping with his remarkable detecting exploits. Not that Mr. Moto was ever lacking in fortitude or the physical strength and dexterity to send the most monstrous culprit spinning through space, but in his subtle moments, his moments of intrigue or whimsicality, he was wont to conduct himself very much like Ruth St. Denis doing her White Jade number. This exoticism has now been greatly modified by the cunning member of the International Police, however, and the character has grown in conviction and likableness. The firmer chin and more resolute eye, together with factors of story and direction, result in Peter Lorre being seen to better advantage in the present film than in any of the earlier pictures of the series. During the course of the story he impersonates both a Chinese servant boy and an erratic old German artist, and in both renditions Lorre stamps himself an actor of imagination and excellent training. The old German was especially fetching.

Characters Are Colorful . . .

NORMAN FOSTER has manifested a keen eye for characterization and a live sense of dramatic values in his direction. The Lime House sequences abound in colorful cockney types, all drawn with bold, individual strokes. One little woman, uncredited, is a gem. Throughout most of the film the movement is good, though there were certain scenes, particularly those in the apartment of the man who is threatened with murder, which probably could have been told with less dialogue. The story was a bit slow in getting under way because of a delay in

making known to the audience the precise nature of the villainy in which the "gang" was specializing. Otherwise, the yarn by Philip MacDonald and Norman Foster holds interest and affords Mr. Moto ample opportunity to demonstrate his extraordinary physical and mental prowess. London, incidentally, is a good locale for the Moto stories. It is for most detective stories, but there are contrasts there, sophistication and squalor, which form particularly good background for the almond-eyed detective.

Art Work Distinguished . . .

THE fine atmosphere of the picture is greatly contributed to by the art work of Bernard Herzbrun and Lewis Creber, as well as by the photography of Virgil Miller. Occasional weird strains from Samuel Kaylin's orchestra heighten the effects of desolate, dimly-lit streets and other ill-boding regions. Mary Maguire, Henry Wilcoxon, who is deserving of much better parts than this, Erik Rhodes, and Harold Huber all give good accounts of themselves. Leon Ames and Forrester Harvey in almost equally important parts turn in very competent characterizations. Mr. Moto is fortunate in having a double—I presume a double is used—of unusual resemblance. Not only is he of the same build as Lorre, but, or so I fancy, his mannerisms are somewhat the same. An accomplished acrobat too. Which reminds me, I must learn to do the jiu-jitsu or whatever school of combat it is that Mr. Moto practices. Perfectly astounding, indeed incredible, things can be done to one's adversaries, no matter how many or how formidable, by a few agile twists of the wrists.

SYMPHONIES AND SHOTGUNS . . .

● **TWO GUN JUSTICE:** Monogram; supervision, Maurice Conn; director, Alan James; original screen play, Fred Myton; photography, Jack Greenhalgh; film editor, Richard G. Wray; musical director, Dr. Edward Kilenyi. Cast: Tim McCoy, Betty Compson, Joan Barclay, John Merton, Al Bridges, Tony Patton, Alan Craven, Lane Chandler, Harry Strange, Olin Francis, Earl Dwire, Enid Parrish.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

THE immortal masters have considerable to do with the creation of Monogram's new *Two Gun Justice*, monumental symphonic works forming an impressive background for much of the ridin' and shootin', villainy and heroism. Apparently most of the tonal treats are from recordings, and not scored for the action, but they lend elegance to the proceedings nevertheless. At the climax, hero Tim McCoy boldly stalks down the quiet village street—nearly

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everyone else having fled in terror—in pursuit of the culprit, who awaits him, gun in hand, at the gang hang-out. No dialogue is heard for quite a spell, only the steady stalking of McCoy commands our attention, except when he quickly turns now and then to plug a sniper. Anyway, the grim, black image of the hero assumes a strange affinity with the weird Wagnerian excerpt, or whatever it is, and for a few moments we are back in the era of true camera.

Direction Is Capable . . .

NUMEROUS touches such as this lead one to believe that several persons connected with the production had an eye for quality in motion pictures, despite the unpretentious nature of the present opus. Alan James has directed the piece with a sure hand; the gestures and movements of his actors are well planned, the story has a swift tempo, and a burly, swaggering spirit. Tim McCoy's acting has improved a great deal since I last saw him. In the present role he is obliged to impersonate a Mexican bandit during part of the action, and he is really quite clever at it, investing the fellow with an easy, amusing dialect and a good measure of élan. Some of the Mexican's wit and dash might profitably be assumed in the actor's straight parts. Also outstanding in the cast is Tony Patton, as a cowardly derelict. Whether this characterization is an oft-repeated stunt I cannot say, being unable to recall having seen the actor before, but in the present rendition he has moments of considerable power. Betty Compson, looking positively ingenuish these days, makes an ingratiating shady lady, albeit her playing was accented a bit more than was necessary, and Bart Kane, Lane Chandler and others are believable bad-men.

Camera Work Meritorious . . .

JACK GREENHALGH, cinematographer, deserves mention for the imagination he has shown in filming the story. His many transitional effects between scenes, "wipes" and the like, give variety and movement to the picture. Truck shots and other devices emphasize and punctuate the action. Lighting is consistently good. It is especially gratifying to see good craftsmanship in low-budget pictures, where resources are limited and it is easy to let merely adequate work do. The yarn itself, by Fred Myton, is

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formula stuff, about the eagle-eyed gunner, the hero, who insinuates himself into the trust of the outlaws through representing himself as a desperado, and then maneuvers to bring them all to justice. That McCoy could face the same men alternately as a federal man and then as the Mexican, and get away with it, is probably far-fetched, as is his amazing adroitness with the trigger. But then, all Western heroes are far-fetched. Where can one draw the line? Western-film fans will doubtless accept it all in good faith.

PROPAGANDA AND THE SCREEN

By ALBERT BENHAM

Director, Motion Picture Department, National Council for Prevention of War

(From the Bulletin on Current Films, which Mr. Benham edits. The May 10 Bulletin quotes at length an article which appeared recently in the Spectator. What appears below is Mr. Benham's contribution to the discussion.)

MR. QUIGLEY has repeatedly written in the columns of his journal, *The Motion Picture Herald*, that the sole purpose of the screen is to entertain. Well-grounded arguments to the contrary by such recognized authorities as Mr. Beaton, Dr. Edgar Dale of the Ohio State University, Frank Nugent of the *New York Times*, and others have failed to budge Mr. Quigley from his stubborn stand. He is like an over-indulgent mother, refusing to recognize an offspring's shortcomings, who insists that "everybody is out of step but my son Jim."

On the one hand, Martin Quigley maintains that propaganda has no place in the theatrical motion picture and he accuses Dr. Dale and other educators of trying to dominate the screen and to become dictators of screenfare. But he refuses to face the fact that motion pictures are replete with propaganda; that, for example, the United States Government is encouraging with renewed vigor the production of movies based on numerous branches of military service in order to sell the public on the Administration's giant armament program. Surely Mr. Quigley cannot deny that this is propaganda—or does he object only to certain types of propaganda? A trip to the nearest newsreel theatre will convince him that the newsreels, by their over-emphasis of the military, are propagandizing one side of a political issue.

Any attempt on the part of the public to exert an influence on theatrical screenfare is met by Mr. Quigley with derision. The screen has no responsibility to society, he says, and has no right to delve beneath the shallow surface of amusement for its material. He is hopelessly outnumbered, however, by those who believe that the motion picture is a living, breathing factor in its ability to affect the public mind and national policy as well. To most people, the question of keeping this country out of war is the paramount issue today for they realize that our very democracy depends on peace. They know that the screen is increasingly playing an integral part in forming the public's attitude on the peace-war question.

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

HOLLYWOOD cameramen and directors will object if I contend that the film is still a one-dimensional art, just as painting is, although men have made pictures since a more articulate cave dweller discovered the art of ideography when he extinguished a torch against a rock and thus laid the foundation for the charcoal pencil industry. Perspective is still an optic illusion on the film. It is a suggestion which, true enough, has succeeded greatly. I would prefer to call sound *per se* the second dimension of the cinematic screen, color (in the prismatic sense), the third dimension. To music I would reserve the honored and mysterious position of the fourth dimension. By virtue of a universality of address it eludes censors and topical controversies. Music can shout on behalf of a mob and be as intelligible as Hamlet of the monologue. Music can weigh the tremulous question of the wistful Prince in less time than an actor can speak one sentence and yet voice a single sentence with more voices, more inflections and innuendo. Music, by virtue of dynamics and color of its own, can denote distance and direction, and thus create space out of its own magic substance. In the theatre we are aware of the author's direction of "music from the left." With the proper stage direction on the film stage, music can come from everywhere, best of all from within the audience as well as the actor. Music makes the cinematic screen not only four-dimensional. It gives it a telepathic, quasi-psychic power. Music can expand cinema into the realm of the super-dimensional, provided the opportunity is created and exploited legitimately.

Taking a Holiday . . .

COLUMBIA studios has made much and wisely effective use of music in various productions, but it has taken a holiday from music in the picture *Holiday*. That may have been done for better or for worse. I admit to being puzzled by the tenor of this presentation and hesitate an assertion to the extent that more music would have been an improvement. In more than one instance, I would have preferred seeing and hearing a production again, before venturing an opinion. In ancient Rome, the wisecracks opened a fowl and smelled the entrails before they opined an answer, and then they practiced the art of equivocation with virtuosity. I have no chance of opening the proverbial bird, and if there be "song birds" (whether chesty-sounding sparrows, or luscious-toned nightingales), I must catch them on the wing. Some publicity and music departments have not been helpful in the past with information, or private hearing of recordings. Hollywood still takes too many inopportune holidays from music.

Psychology or Happenstance . . .

THERE does occur in Columbia's *Holiday* an episode, the musical implications of which are fascinating. I am referring to the scene when Linda asks

her sister's fiancée to waltz with her while they are alone in the memory-haunted playroom. A music box plays, but not a dance tune. They dance, hesitantly, stiffly, this gentle and faint little melody being quite expressive of their dim desire for each. It is a scene of emotional apprehension and only as assurance of their dim desire seemingly dawns in them with this dance embrace, does the music change from a tinkly music box tune into a caressing waltz. This strikes me as a rather deft way of indicating by means of music how they rise beyond the hesitant and uncertain state of mutual understanding to a mood of certainty of fulfillment through each other. Perhaps I make more of this musical incident than it was intended. In that case I plead with the Italians: *Si non e vero, ma pen trovato . . .* it may not be true, but it is well invented.

What's In a Title? . . .

WHAT disappointed me definitely, was the utter meaninglessness of the music accompanying the title. Considerable thought is devoted in some studios and for certain pictures to unrolling the title legend with visual folderal of diverse matter. The purpose is to give individuality to these "fly-leaves" of the cinematic "story," just as a thoughtful publisher will pay attention to the proper appearance of the fore-and-end-sheets of a book. I am not in favor of making the binding of a book "better" than the contents, but the binding is apt to aid or decrease appeal and success of a novel, whether it has obvious connection with the content of the book or not. I think that music accompanying the title can be compared to the binding of a book. I admit that the opening situation called hardly for music of particular moment. However there must have been music in the heart of a man in the boy-met-girl mood. Nevertheless, I will readily agree to do without music, but, if my guess regarding the dance scene should have been correct, then that waltz tune would have proven a proper theme for the title music. I am glad Producer Riskin and Director George Cukor refrained from forcing upon us Brother Ned's alcohol-sunk piano concerto. Of course, it might have proven quite amusing and a little pathetic. However, afterthoughts of a reviewer are . . . just what they are, afterthoughts. It is forethought that makes a picture and music what they might be.

Glorifying Irving Berlin . . .

TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX accomplished a smart as well as an entertaining thing in *Alexander's Ragtime Band*. General Manager of Productions Zanuck has added another big-seller, if not best-seller, to his list. Film critics may take umbrage at the story, but I can see but little reason for censure. No one has claimed that it is the story of Irving Berlin's life. But it might well be a story from life, and life has charming inclinations which may seem too charming to reviewers of plays. There

hardly could be more of Berlin, American composer, in this production, and if I have used the expression "glorifying Irving Berlin," then I have done it in all sincerity. I am far from believing that popularity makes a composer great. It may induce wealth in the case of popular song-writers, but Berlin, the composer, possesses a verve, an individuality, a spontaneity, a robustness of gaiety and emotion which singled him out 27 years ago. This rare combination contributed to the lasting appeal of his music. Whether or not, and how much his early "hit", this piece called *Alexander's Ragtime Band*, owes the march-king, Sousa, is not important. The salutary fact remains that Berlin has repeated its success, improved on it, best proof of which is found during almost two hours of music for this latest of Twentieth Century-Fox musicals. Several times the studio preview audience broke into plaudits during the film. They too glorified this typically American song writer.

A Garland of Songs . . .

IN ADDITION to three new songs written for this production, the film score contains 25 of the best-liked Berlin songs. I arrive at this total via the welcome and well-printed anthology issued by the studio. The book awakens old memories also by way of reproducing the original title pages. There are the war-time tunes, also those specifically Negroic ballads, of which more than a flavor runs at times through not a few of Berlin's numerous tunes. They show the consistency and sincerity of Berlin's muse. He is his own lyricist, for better or for worse. To be sure words and melodies—whichever were first—belong together genuinely, which cannot be said often for America's best-paid song-writers. Berlin is not an effect seeker by spicing and garnishing melodies with harmonies, which make so many current songs sound alike. Even his new songs are free from this harmonic gingerbread and highly colored sugar-icing. There can be no need for listing the old songs. The new, every one of the three has what its name implies. "Now It Can Be Told" is a frankly sentimental love song. "My Walking Stick" is a smartly glittering cabaret action smash-hit and "Marching Along with Time" has punchy rhythm, broad swing and shows how Berlin's harmonic resources have gained since he set American feet moving in accent to his music.

"My Ears Slapped Down" . . .

TWO years ago I flew from El Paso to Denver in an old Lockheed-Vega of the variety which belonged to the variety of planes not yet sound-proofed against motor noise. Something of such blasting, banging, shrilling I re-experienced during the studio preview of *Alexander's Ragtime Band*. It is tedious business to inveigh against this brutally foolish notion of some studio official or tone-deaf operator who turns music into a monstrosity. I would be able to speak better and more detailed of this production, except for these chamber of horrors tactics. I remained only for the sake of witnessing the exhi-

bition of the film and to hear what my preview-hardened eardrums would accept in time for this issue of the *Hollywood Spectator*. I wish that Darryl Zanuck, Irving Berlin, or Musical Director Al Newman could have been subjected to this racket. Having been a guest at their house, so to speak, I dislike belittling their hospitality, but having spent my time not only in anticipation of pleasure, but also in the hope of being of service to them, to their and my public—who are the same—I object to having "my ears slapped down," to quote a favorite expression of the heroine in this film. It seemed as if they were boxed especially hard during the big musical numbers, sounded as if the sound-operator wished to imitate the trumpets of Jericho.

Paging Alfred Newman . . .

UNDER the circumstances, I am a somewhat noise-bewildered witness on behalf of Musical Director Al Newman and his smoothly working collaborators: vocal arranger, Charles Henderson, and orchestrators, Ed Powell, Herbert Spencer and Gene Rose. The short episodes of not abnormally loud background music proved excellent recordings. I presume the same might be said generally, but quality was lost in the raucous reproduction. There can be no question regarding the general elan and musical emphasis of Director Newman's contribution. He showed splendid taste and fidelity in not permitting anything which would have changed or weighted down or watered down the masculinity and languor of Berlin's original expression. Connecting music between numbers was organically worked out, and the whole musical kept at a pulse which had drama, and was in keeping with the dramatic situations. I think opening and closing title music is important and Newman provided fitting sequences. There was stirring pathos in the climactic scene, when the army puts on a hilarious show and then marches off to the grimmest of shows on the Western Front. A superb bit of sound-psychology, ingeniously compounded and equally well recorded, was the long-sustained blast of the steamer siren. It cried aloud the pain of a lover's bitter quarrel.

Good Vocal Perspective . . .

MUSIC DIRECTOR Al Newman and Vocal Arranger Charles Henderson took great care in obtaining proper dynamic perspective regarding vocal and orchestral recording. Unfortunately Ethel Merman came in for some particular abuse by the maniac in the sound-room at this preview. Alice Faye fared better and I think her singing is far better than in *Sally, Irene and Mary*. Her low tones were beautiful and her tone-production is generally freer and relaxed and brighter. Hers is too nice a voice to waste on chesty crooning as in the previous production mentioned. Don Ameche has an expressive, well-managed baritone and he phrases with intelligent meaning. Tyrone Power was not heard vocally, but he demonstrated—as the film proceeded—surprising facility as the bandleader he impersonates. There are times when one could well believe he was actu-

ally conducting and not accompanying the "play-back" with baton gestures. All in all there is much in *Alexander's Ragtime Band* to make it a production emotionally and musically convincing. As intimated before, the film may not be actually biographic, but it is life, very much part of the music which is the life of Irving Berlin. That the New York taxi driver, when turning on the radio to tune in on a Carnegie Hall broadcast should dial to 640—which is the wave length of KFI in Los Angeles—proves at least that this happened in a real taxicab.

* * *

CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by

RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD

of

MABEL KEEFER

WE DO too much of our thinking on the gas stove!

So said our minister in a recent sermon and, in the slanguage of the day, I think he's got something there. The idea has started a train of thought in my mind that goes something like this: In the matter of cooking, the gas stove is convenient when quick work is necessary—really valuable in an emergency—but there are certain foods that need to simmer over a slow, steady coal fire to bring out the full flavor, and still others that are best broiled over wood coals—certain kinds of wood that add to the flavor. Maybe it would be a good thing if we simmered more of our thinking over a slow fire, and used the right kind of wood to give pungency to certain of our ideas. And maybe too many of our motion pictures have been made on the gas stove.

* * *

HAVING read again Mr. Beaton's ringing editorial having to do with the tremendous influence the screen might have on universal peace—this time as it is quoted in the current film bulletin of the National Council For Prevention of War—I shake my head in bewilderment and mutter, "Why don't they do something, or at least explain why they don't do something?"

* * *

KNOW what is the cause of the alleged box-office illness of the film industry, aside from the several minor ailments with which it is afflicted? *Gigantitis* is the disease that is really getting it down.

* * *

WALTZ SONG: When you waltz with me, dear, do you hear what I hear in the strains of music entrancing? My heart's in my throat, and I'll bless every note if you hear what I hear while we're dancing! . . . When the music says "I love you," my heart sings the sweet refrain; its soft, tender tones thrill me through and through, with a joy that is almost pain. We waltz and waltz the hours away—my eyes try your heart to woo—can't you hear the words my lips ache to say, when the music says

"I love you." Hear the song of the violin (*I love you*); the song of the cello your heart must win (*I love you*). Now the alto sax in much the same style (*I love you*); even the voice of the big bass viol (*I love you*). We waltz and waltz the hours away—my eyes try your heart to woo—can't you hear the words my lips ache to say, when the music says "I love you."

* * *

PRETTY nice to find a big bunch of long-stemmed violets and lovely ferns on your desk on a fine Spring morning and have them sitting in front of you all day so that when your eyes are tired of looking at measly little figures you can raise them to the cool mass of purple and green and be reminded of forest glades and bosky dells and feel extremely felicitated about the whole thing!

* * *

TROGLODYTE—I had to look it up in the dictionary, and I really am feeling a little nonplused, as one so often is when one goes delving into one's ancestry.

* * *

RADIO magazine carries a most interesting interview with Kate Smith, on the subject of the emancipation of women—whether they have paid too great a price for their new freedom. Kate Smith says, "In the first place, I think the average woman is confused. She doesn't know what she wants." I think I would go farther than that and say that a great many of the things the average modern woman thinks she wants are just a lot of hooey. And what has that to do with the cinema? You'd be surprised!

* * *

QUOTING John Muir: "A sheep scarcely possesses a separate existence, the whole flock is required to make an individual." And speaking of producers—oh, that's right, I guess we weren't. Well, then, speaking of all of us; we are so afraid that we will not do exactly what the flock is doing, we wedge our way into it, and so have no perspective and no individual initiative.

* * *

TONIGHT did come at last, and I have seen *Robin Hood* and would see it again were it not for a small matter of finances. However, it no doubt will come back to one of the other theatres, and I have heard many people say that if it does they intend to see it again. Good box-office, eh, what? I particularly want to see it again, because, after reading Dr. Ussher's review—rather, rereading it—I feel that several interesting facts in connection with the music got by me.

* * *

BUT stay! . . . A sudden thought strikes me anent *Robin Hood*! 'Tis propaganda—I vow 'tis propaganda of the rankest sort! It doth hold up before us a champion of the oppressed, and doth show us loyalty, courage and square dealing. Think you this can be entertainment Nay, 'tis—'tis—well, 'tis what it is, gadzooks!

THIS HOLLYWOOD

By Bert Harlen

MOVING FINGER WRITES . . .

HOLLYWOODIANS are living through fascinating times, fascinating if one is not greatly affected by them, for the local citizenry is privileged to witness from ring-side seats, as it were, motion picture history being made with a vengeance. Within only the past few months forces both inside and outside of the industry have gathered astounding momentum, inexorably battering and tearing away at the old order of things. Items in the current news columns are unusually indicative of the precipitous and fundamental changes taking place. The Senate has passed the Neely Bill, which asks a federal ban on block booking, a form of government regulation for which exhibitors have been agitating for more than a decade. Within the industry the Actors' Guild is planning to drop another 3,000 extras from its membership, thus adding further to the stabilization of working conditions in the film capital.

Commercials Are Welcomed . . .

THROUGHOUT the country a kick-back of resentment against inefficient management of the industry and the consequent release of preponderantly mediocre pictures, is at last being made by a long patient public. Box-office grosses have fallen and are continuing to fall alarmingly in many quarters. Few other than exceptional pictures are making any appreciable profit. Moreover, of the successful pictures an increasing number continue to come from abroad; four or five English films have been outstanding successes in the East during the past few weeks. An added challenge to the industry is being made by commercial film enterprises, the produce of which has recently attained a high average of entertainment value, and which is being welcomed by many exhibitors eager to save or make a few dollars to recoup their shrunken returns on the usual Hollywood fare. "The Moving Finger" is writing in shorthand.

Will Be Colossal, Terrific . . .

THE Neely Bill, of course, being pigeonholed in the House, will probably not be enacted this session, which means it must revert to the status of new legislation next term, even before the Senate. But considering the long battle for such legislation, its passage by the Senate with little opposition is significant. When it is enacted, and the possibilities of such an event taking place next term are very good, there will ensue the most revolutionary movement within the industry since the advent of sound. The shake-up and readjustment it will occasion will be both colossal and terrific. The axe will fall in many directions—and on many necks. For the production and release of motion pictures will then be placed upon a basis at least comparable to that underlying the production

of stage shows or the printing of books. There will be no assured market for mediocre films. The salvation of Hollywood, under an altered distribution set-up, will lie in the production of fewer and better pictures. Now, there is not sufficient talent or executive brains for producing a number of good pictures comparable with that of the middling ones at present being released. Re-alignment of personnel and reorganization of the production system, on a unit plan, will be necessary to meet the new requirements. This does not mean there will not be a continued market, though a decreasing one, for certain types of low-budget films, Westerns and such, but even these will have to possess sure entertainment value according to the standards of their kind.

Time Will Change Everything . . .

IT IS interesting to contemplate the changes which will take place in the motion picture industry within the next decade. Certainly Hollywood will be a town of much greater sense and system, the industry having reached a state of comparative stabilization by then. There will be fewer workers, but they will be more skilled, their jobs steady and dependable. The workers, including the extras, will be relatively sure of consistent advancement if they manifest outstanding ability. Stars, however, will not be as much publicized, will not make the exorbitant salaries they do today; the director as a creative artist will have begun to come into his own. Less than half the number of films now being produced

STANLEY CORTEZ

A.S.C.

DIRECTOR PHOTOGRAPHY

"The Lady in the Morgue"



Universal

will be made then. Longer shooting schedules and greater care will feature in their production, but they will cost no more to make than an average A of today, and they will net greater returns. Pictures will be properly planned, with no excessive script or no excessive film footage. Probably a fourth of the films shown in this country will be of foreign make, most of these being British. All this in ten years, did I say? Well, maybe fifteen.

CAMERA ANGLES

By Robert Joseph

NEWSREELS IN THE DOLDRUMS...

THERE is a movement on foot to do away with double bills and substitute single features of outstanding quality. Samuel Goldwyn has joined forces with the people who count—the box office patrons—and given them his full support. How much thought has been given to the short features which will become a necessary part of the programs of the future? Chief of these short subjects is, of course, the newsreels. As a reviewer I see a great number of pictures and therefore see a variety of newsreels. The last few weeks have impressed me with nothing but uniform sameness in the case of several different newsreels; and a uniform lack of interesting subjects. For five weeks running I have seen Florida blurbs that by no stretch of the imagination can be mistaken for *news*. Even Graham McNamee's double entendres did not make those "Florida sunkist beauties" seem interesting. At best the Florida chips are mental offsprings of high-powered peninsula publicity agents. I have seen a man encased in ice; fur bathing suits; a novel sun tanning meter; shoes; legs, legs, legs, and legs. And a beach empty except for the stalwarts who are making the picture, suggests that Florida isn't so hot anyway.

* * *

PUSSYFOOTING AND PROPAGANDA . . .

WILL HAYS writes: "The industry has resisted and must continue to resist the lure of propaganda in a sinister sense persistently urged upon it by extremist groups." Since there is nothing specifically noted here it is a little difficult to ascertain what is meant. (Stuart Chase would have a semantic holiday with this annual report, according to the conclusions of his book, *Tyranny of Words*.) Contrast this statement with that of the Institute for Propaganda Analysis, recently quoted by Editor Beaton. I believe the quotation is important enough to bear repeating. "Only in rare instances is it (the film) an agency for illuminating problems of human conduct, for developing social insight..." What the *Spectator* unequivocally asks for, then, is propaganda films. Propaganda that speaks social consciousness and social conscience. *All Quiet On The Western Front* was propaganda pure and simple.

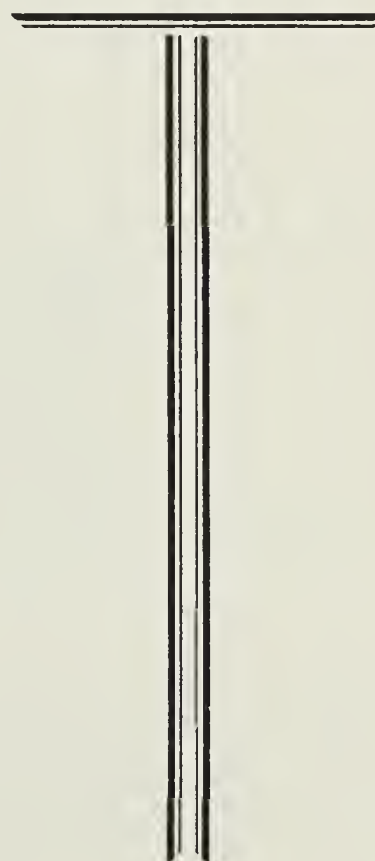
SCREEN PLAY

"The Lady in the Morgue"

by

ERIC TAYLOR

ROBERTSON WHITE



Universal

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A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—June 11, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 9

European Papers Do Not Like the Secrecy
of Greta Garbo's Gadding

Industry Would Be Wise to Prepare for the
Possible Passage of Neeley Bill

Opposition to Commercial Films Deprives
Public of Entertaining Pictures

Walter Wanger Gives the World a Picture
That is a Plea for Peace

... REVIEWS ...

BLOCKADE ★ THREE BLIND MICE ★ THE TOY WIFE
WIVES UNDER SUSPICION ★ SPEED TO BURN

ONLY PUBLICATION IN THE WORLD DEVOTED
EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM



From the EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

FROM EUROPE, ABOUT GARBO . . .

FROM Andre Forchett, a Paris, France, *Spectator* subscriber, comes an interesting letter relating impressions he received on a recent and somewhat comprehensive tour of Europe which included various spots touched by Greta Garbo and Stokowski while they were flitting about Italy and France doing their best to keep one jump ahead of press reporters and cameramen. Forchett tells me that if they had kept it up much longer, Greta's box-office rating in Europe would have suffered a decline, Parisian papers, in particular, resenting her aloofness. Garbo for years has been the outstanding film favorite in Europe. According to Forchett, Clarence Brown, on his recent trip abroad, received marked attention from the press because of his having directed Garbo in so many of her pictures. Only scant mention was made of anything else he has done on the screen. When Garbo visited Continental Europe, the press and public were ready to do her marked homage, and the manner in which she treated both did much to impair her popularity. "If her producers," writes my Paris correspondent, "do not keep her at her home in Sweden or in America, she is going to lose her rating as their greatest money-maker over here."

Victim of Unwise Selling . . .

OVER here Garbo already has lost her top box-office rating. What following she has consists chiefly of those who early became her admirers, and since have been loyal to her. Every year a great new audience enters film theatres, and Garbo does not attract it. The new public cares little for her, and that can be attributed to the manner in which the press, finally tiring of her elusive attitude, has soured on her and turned thumbs down on favorable exploitation. Unwise selling by both Metro and exhibitors has been another factor in reducing her box-office potency. Metro has tried to capitalize her aloofness, and exhibitors think they have done everything possible when they put her name on their marquees. No concerted effort has been made to sell Garbo pictures, but much effort has been made to sell Garbo herself, to force her on an unfavorable market under circumstances which she herself makes difficult. I will admit that exploiting Greta is a tough proposition. The only thing more unwise than not permitting her to talk to the press would be to permit it. There

are few things she can talk about in a manner to impress an audience of reporters. She does not read intellectual writing or seek contact with intellectual groups. It is difficult to analyze her. She is a superb actress, but knows nothing about acting, cannot discuss it or explain her own reactions when going through even a scene which is great when it reaches the screen. All that, of course, is no concern of the public, which pays its money only to see the scene in the picture and has no interest in her thought process while it was being shot. But a star's personal popularity influences consideration of the artistic merit she displays on the screen. Garbo is not personally popular in this country. The box-office reflects that. If acting alone attracted audiences, she would be near the top of the box-office list. The present general box-office depression can be attributed to the film industry's policy of selling people instead of pictures. I have advanced that argument so many times that I will content myself now merely by introducing Greta Garbo as Exhibit A in proving its soundness.

* * *

CLARENCE SCORES A BULL'S EYE . . .

ON THE cover of the *Spectator* of February 26, the leading article in the issue was exploited as follows: "Cutting Down Dialogue; By Simple Device *Spectator* Has Urged on Picture Producers for Years, Clarence Brown Shows How It Can Be Done." The article inside dealt with a sequence in *Of Human Hearts* in which the camera told the story without the help of dialogue. The other day a technician who worked on the set when the picture was being shot, told me he heard Clarence say, after a scene had been completed, "We are now going to make a scene for Welford Beaton." The scene was the one I analyzed after seeing the picture in preview. Clarence hit the mark he aimed at.

* * *

ANTI-BLOCK BOOKING MENACE . . .

THAT there is reasonable expectancy of the Neeley anti-block booking bill passing both Houses of Congress and becoming a law of the land is expressed by *Variety* (N. Y.), which concludes an extensive review of the case with this paragraph: "Unless something is done to appease the reform element or to both really excite and convince a substantial

element of Congress that block booking is fair to exhibitors, as well as the most economical and suitable method of distributing Hollywood output, it appears only a question of time before the majors will find the system outlawed by Congressional decree. History of such campaigns is that it usually takes several years to make a running start but once a bill has gone through one branch of the national parliament eventual enactment is a foregone conclusion." The difficulty which *Variety* suggests is that the film industry will find it hard to persuade Congress that the present selling practice is fair to exhibitors; and if an effort be made to prove it is the "most economical and suitable method of distributing Hollywood output," the industry will find itself in danger of being laughed out of court. Before the opponents of the bill toy lightly with the word "economy" they should prepare themselves to establish the justice of the enormous executive salaries and the millions of dollars distributed annually in the form of bonuses which swell the incomes of those already receiving the salaries. Senators and Congressmen probably will take little interest in the technicalities of the film industry's distribution methods. The size of the salaries and bonuses alone will be sufficient to persuade them that something is wrong somewhere, and they will support the bill in the hope that, whatever it is about, it probably will have a beneficial effect in making film financial affairs less fanciful.

Business's Main Asset . . .

SATISFIED customers constitute the main asset of any business. I am by no means an authority on the industrial history of the United States and may be wrong in my belief that it contains no record of any other concerted move on Congress by customers of a specific industry to seek relief from what they consider unfair selling practices. For ten years on the film horizon there has been the smoke of discontent, and there must be some reason for the fire's continued burning. Recently I wrote of the case of the owner of a film theatre in Needles who wished to secure Deanna Durbin's *Mad About Music* and was told by Universal that the only way he could get it would be to buy twenty-six other pictures with it. I can see no fundamental difference between that and a haberdasher's refusal to sell a customer a suit of pajamas unless he purchases also twenty-six pairs of socks. There must be something wrong with any selling practice which makes it necessary for a customer to buy a lot of articles he does not want to get one he wants. Another point which must impress the bystander is the fact that the anti-block movement has been carried on persistently for a decade. It would seem that it must have some merit to give it so long a life. Independent exhibitors, who are waging the war, are a common sense lot; if their cause had no merit, they would know it by now and would accept the present selling methods as the film industry's legitimate manner of conducting its business. But to top all the other arguments is the fact I already have mentioned—the industry has a lot of

dissatisfied customers. And during the decade the methods have been attacked, the film barons have made no movement of their own volition to reduce the cause of the dissatisfaction. If that is a demonstration of good business judgment, then I must be wrong about Hitler and all other topics upon which I have definite convictions.

* * *

EDITH DOES OWN SINGING . . .

AMONG the young screen players whose careers should prove interesting to follow is that of Edith Fellowes, a clever young miss whose most recent picture was *Little Miss Roughneck*, in which she plays the name part, and which ends with a grand opera excerpt which Edith sings in a manner that made all the Hollywood people who saw it take it for granted that some gifted grand opera singer had done the singing and that what they heard was not Edith's voice. But it was, and it appears to me that it will not be long until this talented young person becomes a big star in big musical screen productions. Already she has demonstrated that she is an actress of ability, and all she needs to assure her gaining vast popularity is intelligent handling by the producers in whose pictures she appears.

* * *

GUARDIANS OF OUR WELFARE . . .

WILL HAYS refuses to give his benediction to commercial films. "The sole mission of the screen is to entertain," shouts the Quigley publications. Straight advertising on the screen is unthinkable and propaganda is abhorrent. Let us suppose the management of the Ambassador Hotel wished to draw the Cocoanut Grove to the attention of the entire country, to advertise it, to spread Grove propaganda far and wide; and suppose it paid Paramount to make a picture showing the Grove and bearing its name. And suppose Paramount filled the order by making the picture, *Cocoanut Grove*. Would you refuse to laugh at the comedy in it because it was a commercial picture? Would you see no merit in the music because the picture was made for purposes of propaganda? As a matter of fact, would you care two hoots who paid the cost of production or why the picture was made, as long as it entertained you? And how do you know the Ambassador did not pay for it? You don't know—or care. But Mr. Hays cares. The Quigley publications care. You may trust them to guard you against the evil commercial pictures would do you. It is all right for you to see *Cocoanut Grove* because Paramount made it, but if precisely the same picture had been made by the Ambassador, something awful would happen to you if you saw it. Let us give thanks for Mr. Hays and Mr. Quigley.

Propaganda Not Recognized . . .

QUIGLEY'S contention that the screen's mission is to entertain is a sound one. The *Spectator's* contention is that useful propaganda has a place on the screen if it be presented in an entertaining manner, a contention the mere mention of which infuriates the

publisher. Warners made a propaganda picture, one whose plea is for prison reform, *Crime School*, its name. Several times I have charged Quigley with not knowing what propaganda is, but in my review of *Crime School* I gave him credit for being consistent and stated my belief that the *Herald* would be scathing in its denunciation of the Warner preachment. But it looks as if I was justified in accusing him of not knowing what he was talking about. At all events, the *Herald* swallowed *Crime School*, hook, line and sinker, and without recognizing it as outright propaganda. I quote the opening paragraph of its review of the picture: "Grim, forceful, yet not forbidding because of the wealth of robust human humor it contains, the moral preached and the sane way in which the love interest has been included, *Crime School* promises to attract wide attention. It is instructive as a study in sociology, wherein incorrigible boy criminals become bestial under cruel corrective treatment, yet, when given a chance, respond to humane considerate influences, nevertheless, in the last analysis *Crime School* is entertaining, stark at times but always delivered in straight from the shoulder style."

Factual Film a Treat . . .

ONE evening recently I took a course in steel making. I saw every process from the scooping up of the iron deposits to the tempering of the steel until it is ready to be made into a needle or a battleship, a buttonhook or a bridge. It was an intensely interesting four-reel illustrated lecture, or rather a visual demonstration of how steel is made, the pictures accompanied by an entertaining talk by Edwin C. Hill and a sympathetic musical score by Robert Armbruster. Technicolor photography not only makes the scenes more authentic—granting it catches the natural colors—but it is responsible for some of the most beautiful shots I have seen on any screen. To the person with a questing mind, *Steel, Man's Servant*, will come as an intellectual treat; to the average picture patron it would be an outstanding feature on any film theatre program, beauty, thrills and instruction being blended in a truly showmanship manner. There is no advertising; nothing is offered for sale and the film has no direct commercial significance.

How Hollywood Will Regard It . . .

BUT the film industry will deny the people who support it the pleasure of seeing *Steel* because it was made by the subsidiaries of the U. S. Steel Corporation. Will Hays viewed it, said it was grand, but that his organization could not handle it because it was a commercial film. The makers offered it to various general releasing companies, but all of them spurned it as if it were something unclean. I do not know upon what terms it would be offered exhibitors, but I imagine they could get it for only the cost of handling, which would be a boon to them with box-office conditions as they are now. But no—it is a commercial film, made outside the industry—and imagine giving exhibitors entertainment for practi-

cally nothing! The very thought is enough to make our film barons shudder. If the public wants instruction with its screen entertainment, it can patronize the regular product of the Hollywood studios and be instructed in how to make love, how to dance the Big Apple, how to drink hard liquor and acquire other similar social airs and graces. *Steel* is propaganda, Hollywood will claim—propaganda for what, it would find difficult to state, unless it is for the use of steel in the building of steel bridges and steel skyscrapers, and if the steel industry wants to impress that fact on the housewives of the Dakotas, let it go hire a hall, which is the advice Martin Quigley, on behalf of the film industry, told nationally prominent educators who had the effrontery to express an interest in the current trend of film entertainment.

* * *

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

MY PUTTING was so bad on my last round of golf that on the eighteenth green my ball finally dropped into the cup through sheer ennui. . . . Before we depart for a formal affair I have to pass Mrs. Spectator's inspection; during the thirty years she has been doing it she never once has failed to take a final jab at my tie. . . . The office in which I do my writing is one hundred and twenty-six feet long and forty-two feet wide; its ceiling has great holes in it and in its walls are wide-open spaces; it is floored with flowers and gravel walks, and roofed and walled with mulberry, locust, pepper, acacia and cypress trees, beneath which is garden perfume and from which come the songs of birds. . . . While Freddie, the spaniel, was galloping down a path just now, a mocking bird zoomed down head-on at him unexpectedly and he stopped so suddenly he skidded on his behind; when I laughed he slunk under a hydrangea bush where he is now sulking. . . . I told Sid Grauman I did not roller-skate; he said he didn't; I challenged him to put on skates with me and race me; he accepted with so much alacrity that I am staying away from his roller skating place, even though everyone tells me it is an interesting place to visit. . . . Why ants—the red ones that eat flowers? I have to pour poison down the entrances to their dug-outs, and around the entrances next morning are hundreds of their little dead bodies; I don't like to kill things, but what is a fellow to do? . . . He hoo-hooed at me through the fence which skirts our dirt road, a six-year-old friend of mine who lives somewhere along it; in each hand he had an empty beer bottle; I told him to go along to the gate, which Mrs. Spectator opened for him, and when he reached me he asked me if I wanted to buy two bottles; said someone told him someone bought bottles and he thought I might be the one; wanted a nickel for them; I had only a dime and I offered that; nothing doing, a nickel or nothing. Why? Because the Good Humor man soon would be down the road and you couldn't buy what he wanted with a dime, as it cost a nickel, and he had to have a nickel, or perhaps five pennies would do. There apparently being no nickel anywhere about the place, Mrs. Spectator and I, by pool-

ing our resources, managed to produce the right number of pennies, and the deal was concluded just as there came to us the tinkle of the Good Humor bell. Would anyone like to take off our hands two used beer bottles? All we are asking for them is the amount of our investment in them. No profiteers are we.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

WALTER WANGER SERVES HUMANITY . . .

● **BLOCKADE**; Walter Wanger-UA; producer, Walter Wanger; director, John Howard Lawson; photography, Rudy Mate and Russell Lawson; special effects, James Basevi; music, Werner Janssen; film editor, Dorothy Spencer. Cast: Madeleine Carroll, Henry Fonda, Leo Carrillo, John Halliday, Vladimir Sokoloff, Reginald Denny, Robert Warwick, William B. Davidson, Fred Kohler, Peter Godfrey, Carlos de Valdez, Katherine de Mille, George Byron, Nick Thompson, Rosina Galli, Ramon Ros, Dolores Duran, Guy d'Ennery, Edward Brady, Murdoch MacQuarrie, Harry Semels, Baby Marie de la Paz, Demetrius Emanuel, Hugh Prosser, Arthur Aylesworth, George Lloyd, Allen Garcia, Herbert Heywood, Roger Drake, Paul Bradley, Carl Stackdale, Skins Miller, Evelyn Selbie, Mary Fox, Belle Mitchell, Cecil Weston, Ricca Allen.

THE screen has made its plea for peace, has stripped war of the remainder of its rapidly disappearing glamour and has raised an eloquent voice in behalf of all humanity. Walter Wanger's *Blockade* is something more than just a motion picture. It is motion picture history—the first definite recognition by the screen of the fact that its mission is to serve mankind as well as to entertain it. *Blockade* is entertainment, a gripping spy drama that will hold any audience. It does not preach a sermon in which war is denounced and peace extolled. It shows us peace in the opening shot, and later the story leads us through scenes in which in passing we see the crime which war commits—see it in the eyes of hungry babies and their mothers, and read it in the faces of aged men and women, people, all of whom have done nothing to disturb peace, but who pay the biggest price when it is distorted by war. War itself we do not see—no marching troops, no false trappings in which murder is disguised as patriotism—just the stark skeleton of war as it is, a gigantic, heinous international racket in the hands of maniacs who wear the mask of patriotism. For that, the world owes a debt of gratitude to Walter Wanger.

Dieterle's Direction Great . . .

SOLELY from the standpoint of screen entertainment—the determining factor in the extent of its service to the cause of peace—*Blockade* will prove to be a notable box-office success. It is done on a magnificent scale, is directed brilliantly and powerfully, and acted by a cast of outstanding merit. Both Madeleine Carroll and Henry Fonda have many good performances to their credit, but never before have they been inspired to rise to the heights they achieve in this picture as their response to the superb direction of William Dieterle. Differing widely in all its essentials from his *Zola* and *Pasteur*, *Blockade* further stamps Dieterle as one of the screen's really great

directors. The script of John Howard Lawson, his own story written in screen-play form, is brilliant screen writing. The picture rises from the pastoral peace of a Spanish valley in which oxen draw a farmer's wagon and a shepherd pipes to entertain his sheep, from that to the terrific manifestation of man's supreme insanity, suggesting wholesale slaughter on battle fields and showing wholesale suffering in the homes of the slaughtered. But through it all the story pursues its unbroken course, as if interested only in itself, in the recital of its inhumanity and the development of the beautiful romance which still makes it human. You hear the story as it is told in dialogue and you see the sermon as the camera records it; you buy the entertainment and will be satisfied with your investment; you will absorb the sermon and will applaud it.

Some Fine Performances . . .

THE beauty of Madeleine Carroll has been the chief feature in some of the parts she was given to play in former pictures, but in *Blockade* she makes us lose sight of it in our admiration for the feeling and understanding she reveals as a member of the war racketeering group and her ultimate reformation as she exerts her efforts to checkmate her former associates. She and Henry Fonda share some strongly dramatic scenes. What an admirable actor Fonda is! The simplicity of his technique, his earnestness and sincerity make him impressive in any part he plays. To me his appeal is the same as that which makes Jimmie Stewart one of my favorite screen actors. There is something primitive about each of them, an ingenuousness which makes us sympathize with them even before we become aware of a cause for sympathy. I hope *Blockade* will make the demand for Fonda so emphatic that Hollywood will keep him busy. Another feature of the picture which pleased me is the appearance of that able actor, Leo Carrillo, in a part free from the use of dialect. I enjoy him in any role, enjoy his dialect, but the lack of it in *Blockade* comes as a refreshing departure. He gives a fine performance.

Technically a Triumph . . .

BLOCKADE has many speaking parts. In the longer ones we have John Halliday, Vladimir Sokoloff, Reg Denny, Robert Warwick, William B. Davidson and Fred Kohler, able actors all. Scores of others have bits with a line or two each and each does his or her full share towards maintaining the sincerity with which the story is told. Dieterle, being an intelligent director, makes his players talk like the characters they play, a display of directorial technique which the *Spectator* has pleaded should be a feature of all productions, but which we see so seldom it makes it apparent that Hollywood has not sufficient intelligent directors to take care of its entire output. Technically, *Blockade* is a cinematic triumph. The sets of Alexander Toluboff and Wade Robottom lend themselves admirably to the photography of Rudy Maté. The special effects by Russell Lawson and James Basevi are one of the picture's strong assets; and a word of praise must go to

Dorothy Spencer for a notable example of expert film editing. I leave to Bruno Ussher the evaluation of the musical score of Werner Janssen (see page 12), saying no more about it myself than to express the hope that the growth of real screen-art understanding in Hollywood will be rapid enough to speed the day when all screen productions will have continuous scores. The present method of handling music in pictures shows that those responsible for it still are in the cinematic kindergarten class.

ONE OF SEASON'S BEST . . .

● **THREE BLIND MICE**; 20th Century-Fox; associate producer, Raymond Griffith; director, William A. Seiter; screen play, Brown Holmes and Lynn Starling; based on a play by Stephen Powys; photography, Ernest Palmer; theme song, music and lyrics, Lew Pollack and Sidney D. Mitchell; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Hans Peters; film editor, James B. Morley; costumes, Gwen Wakeling; musical director, Arthur Lange. Cast: Loretta Young, Joel McCrea, David Niven, Stuart Erwin, Marjorie Weaver, Pauline Moore, Binnie Barnes, Jane Darwell, Leonid Kinsky, Spencer Charters, Franklin Pangborn, Herb Heywood.

SPARKLING comedy. A story about nice people exclusively and without even the suggestion of a villain. With no heavy to chide them, the characters get into and out of muddles of their own creation, have a jolly time all the way through—a nice, quiet, refined time—and bring to the screen just about the neatest bit of comedy we have had in a year or so. The picture has a smart society atmosphere and displays throughout the best of taste. Of course, the leading characters discuss their most intimate, private affairs so that all the other couples on dance floors can overhear what is said, but that is a conception of refined society conduct which most Hollywood directors have, so when we see it in *Three Blind Mice* we accept it as a matter of course. But it seems strange to me that Bill Seiter, who, on the whole, has done a most brilliant job of direction, should so abruptly take his players out of character by having them air their private affairs in public. The fault, I suppose, lies primarily in the script, and had its birth when pictures were silent and we imagined the players were whispering their confidences into one another's ears.

It Is Well Cast . . .

TO BILL'S credit is a collection of outstanding performances by a group of most agreeable players. Loretta Young, Marjorie Weaver and Pauline Moore play sisters, all nice girls any parents would be glad to have about the house. Loretta, always one of my prime favorites, never was better and creates the impression that she is having a fine time in the part. Both the others display rare charm. Opposite the three is a trio of the screen's most pleasing young men, Joel McCrea, David Niven and Stu Erwin, each of whom long since has established his rating as an accomplished actor. Here they have roles tailored to their individual measures and each acquits himself admirably. A surprise performance is that of Binnie Barnes. It generally has fallen to Binnie's part to be a rather catty person, but here we have her as a joyous

scatterbrain who is a delight in every scene she plays. Witty, vibrant, she romps through her part to the continual accompaniment of audience laughter. Apparently in her we have at hand another accomplished comedienne. Santa Barbara, the locale of the story, has reason to be grateful for the manner in which the production reveals its charms. The picture is a visual treat, both indoor and outdoor shots being artistically composed and beautifully photographed. By all means see *Three Blind Mice*. It will not disappoint you.

WILL HOLD YOUR ATTENTION . . .

● **WIVES UNDER SUSPICION**; Universal; producer, Edmund Grainger; director, James Whale; screen play, Myles Conolly; based on play by Ladislaus Fodor; photography, George Robinson; art direction, Jack Otterson and Chas. H. Clarke; film editor, Charles Maynard; musical direction, Charles Previn. Cast: Warren William, Gail Patrick, Constance Moore, William Lundigan, Ralph Morgan, Cecil Cunningham, Samuel S. Hinds, Milburn Stone, Lillian Yarbo, Jonathan Hale.

THE cheap title drew a snicker from the preview audience, but the picture turned out to be better than its title. It is a well directed domestic drama with murder and murder-trial trimmings. It is all old stuff and it telegraphs ahead what is going to happen, but it will manage to hold your close attention by reason of the impressiveness of Jim Whale's direction, even though he goes a little too far in drawing the character of Warren William and making him unreasonably vicious in his official capacity of district attorney. William is the leading man, the hero, yet I doubt if even at the end, after his reformation and promises to his wife, he will have the degree of audience respect he should have to make the ending convincing. But the whole thing smacks more of the theatre than of the screen. In straining to achieve effect, the picture presents a third degree scene in which an officer of the law screams into a prisoner's ear a demand that he should talk, while a lot of police lean over the helpless victim and beetle their brows at him. As the prisoner (Frank Morgan) already has confessed that he had killed his wife, I could not figure out what the screamer wanted him to talk about. Nor could I understand why later the district attorney, after his sympathy is aroused for Morgan, destroys the wax record of the confession which would have proven the mental stress he was under when he committed the murder.

Performances Uniformly Good . . .

BUT, as I have said, *Wives Under Suspicion* will hold your interest, and that is the chief consideration when you visit a picture house. Morgan's inquisition scene is a brilliant bit of dramatic acting which drew loud applause from the audience. All the performances are satisfactory. Even though his characterization is unnecessarily harsh, William's work appealed to me as the best he has done on the screen. The always attractive and intelligent Gail Patrick scores in a role which her personality relieves of some of its inherent drabness. She makes a wife whose

charm accentuates the story value of her husband's neglect of her, William being the husband who is so intent on chasing criminals that he leaves the way open for some other man to chase his wife. Miss Patrick impresses me more with each performance that she is destined to do big things on the screen. Constance Moore, a newcomer to me, is a charming young thing with beauty and screen personality which should take her places. William Lundigan, who plays opposite her, is her male counterpart, an agreeable young fellow with ability and an ingratiating personality. Cecil Cunningham is cunning but by no means a ham in her engaging characterization as the district attorney's secretary. Lillian Yarbo, a clever young colored woman, contributes comedy which makes it impossible for us to believe her as the maid in the home of such a mistress as Gail Patrick. Jonathan Hale weaves in and out of the story in a capable manner, but leaves us in doubt as to who he is and why he is there. Milburn Stone is another who helps things along satisfactorily. Edmund Grainger, producer, mounted the picture handsomely, some of Jack Otterson's artistic and atmospheric sets giving George Robinson opportunities to present some fine photography.

POOR DIRECTION SPOILS IT . . .

● **THE TOY WIFE**; MGM; producer, Merian C. Cooper; director, Richard Thorpe; screen play, Zoe Akins; photography, Oliver T. Marsh; musical score, Edward Ward; art direction, Cedric Gibbons, Harry McAfee and Edwin B. Willis; women's costumes, Adrian; men's costumes, Gile Steele. Cast: Luise Rainer, Melvyn Douglas, Robert Young, Barbara O'Neil, H. B. Warner, Alma Kruger, Libby Taylor, Theresa Harris, Walter Kingsford, Clinton Rosemond, Clarence Muse, Leonard Penn, Alan Perl.

VICTIM of poor direction. Richard Thorpe, who directed successfully many of Metro's smaller pictures, proves himself unable to develop all the values of the story material he had here. Physically, the picture is a big one, beautifully mounted by that master craftsman, Cedric Gibbons; generous in its use of characters to people its scenes, and rich in the costuming of the period. Brilliantly cast by Producer Merian Cooper and provided with a good script by Zoe Akins, its director had all the ingredients for an outstanding success, but what comes to the screen is ninety minutes of cinematic dawdle and slowly paced action which will weary the majority of people who see it. Thorpe's direction has elemental flaws. In one sequence we see a large dinner party gathered around a table in a private house. After an establishing shot, there is a cut to two of the guests whose conversation we hear. It is all we hear. Apparently all the other guests are stricken speechless by the grandeur of the occasion and are rendered incapable of causing even the tinkle of a fork against a plate. The story is set in the genteel period of the social life of New Orleans of a century ago, yet two of the chief characters, Luise Rainer, the carefully reared daughter of a gentleman of the day (H. B. Warner), and Robert Young, the scion of an aristocratic family, while dancing carry on what

should be an intimate conversation, loudly enough to be heard by all the other dancers.

Miss Rainer in Monotone . . .

BUT the greatest weakness of the picture is the direction of Miss Rainer. Her performance is flightiness in monotone, without a relieving, wholly human touch to reduce its monotony. Her goose-neck gestures, wide-eyed glances and panting dialogue will wear away the resistance of the stoutest audience. The other characters fare better. The ability of Barbara O'Neil, Melvyn Douglas and Robert Young proved strong enough to weather the stilted direction in as far as their individual performances were concerned, but not strong enough to put the picture in the best-seller class. *The Toy Wife* is not box-office, but it could have been if given a more accelerated pace. While we tire of the story itself and the characterization of the leading woman, we do not tire of the three performances I have mentioned and those of Alma Kruger, H. B. Warner, Libby Taylor, Theresa Harris, Clarence Muse (the last three talented colored players), Walter Kingsford and others in small parts. Visually the production is a smart one, beautifully photographed by Oliver Marsh. Adrian once more commits the fault of attiring his women so elaborately that our attention constantly is drawn from what they are doing to what they are wearing. Metro stars com and go, and sometimes I wonder how much Adrian's costuming figures in their going. In a perfect art creation no one element should be made to attract our attention at the expense of the creation as a whole. Adrian's gowns always are individual attractions.

FOR THE YOUNGSTERS . . .

● **SPEED TO BURN**; 20th Century-Fox; associate producer, Jerry Hoffman; director, Otto Brower; screen play, Robert Ellis and Helen Logan; based on original by Edwin Dial Torgerson; photography, Edward Snyder; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Chester Gore; film editor, Fred Allen; musical director, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Michael Whalen, Lynn Bari, Marvin Stephens, Henry Armetta, Chick Chandler, Sidney Blackmer, Johnnie Pirrone, Chas. D. Brown, Inez Palange.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

SEEING this picture is like reading a story from one of those pulp magazines devoted to sport yarns. Dialogue is obvious and stilted, the characters have about as much depth as a mud puddle. There is plenty of action in it, but the plot is fabricated with little ingenuity, being another variation on the form-

(Continued on page 9)

Eyes Examined and Glasses Fitted

DEVER D. GRAY, OPT. D.

OPTOMETRIST

1725 North Highland Avenue

Hollywood, California

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EXHIBITORS' MONTHLY BUYING GUIDE

★ Not many pictures reviewed in May Spectators will do a great deal towards lifting the prevailing box-office gloom. The outstanding money-maker is *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, an attraction which should appeal to all classes of audiences. There are some other productions on the list which have sufficient merit to please audiences, but are not startling enough to arouse the public out of its non-attendance spell. Many good pictures suffer at the box-office chiefly because exhibitors are not good

salesmen. If they have no big names to toy with, they are stumped. The fault for this lies primarily with distributors, who offer names instead of pictures when selling to exhibitors. Some of the most entertaining pictures made in Hollywood during the past year proved poor box-office attractions because they were not trademarked with star names. Wiser selling methods by both distributors and exhibitors, if inaugurated now, eventually would establish box-office conditions on a more stable basis. It is a thought both groups should mull over.

(The figure after each title denotes date in May on which the review appeared in the Spectator)

COLUMBIA

★ **HOLIDAY** (28)—A really notable talkie; an abstract theme given concrete expression and coming to the screen as engrossing entertainment for those who can enjoy a story with more intellectual than emotional appeal. Really outstanding performances by Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant, stars, and Doris Nolan, Lew Ayres, Edward Everett Horton, among supporting players. Perhaps not for small houses, but certainly a first-class attraction for the big ones. Running time, 93 minutes.

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

★ **SWISS MISS** (14)—Hal Roach production presenting Laurel and Hardy in too much of the comedy which made their two-reelers popular—that is, too much for those who can get too much of the two comedians. Those with capacity for absorbing all that is presented here, will find the picture a constant joy. Roach has given it a fine production and the supporting cast is all right. Running time, 72 minutes.

★ **HOLD THAT KISS** (14)—On the whole a pleasing little picture which tells its story smoothly but does not give any member of its cast an opportunity to turn in anything but a routine performance. It is a story of amusing complications and has to its credit the gracious presence of Maureen O'Sullivan who must have friends wherever pictures are shown. If you can get your customers in, they will go out satisfied. Running time, 75 minutes.

★ **THREE COMRADES** (28)—A beautifully done picture, a touching story of a great friendship and a great romance. It will not be appreciated by the masses but if you have customers who can enjoy the best in today's picture making, you, with a clear conscience, can offer this one to them. A fine cast, fine direction and the usual Metro fine production. Running time, 100 minutes.

★ **YELLOW JACK** (28)—A most interesting recital of the series of events and discoveries which resulted eventually in ridding Cuba of the yellow fever scourge which caused the deaths of so many Americans during our occupation of the island following the war with Spain. More a scientific treatise than popular entertainment, but an honestly made picture which will please all those who wish to be informed on the matter it deals with. Running time, 85 minutes.

PARAMOUNT

★ **COCOANUT GROVE** (21)—If your people still go for musicals, they probably will like this one as well as any other they have had lately. I enjoyed it even while wondering how I could enjoy it after seeing so many others

cut from the same pattern. It has the Yacht Club Boys, Ben Blue and other first-class specialists, as well as a capable cast headed by Fred MacMurray and Harriet Hilliard. Good music and complete production. Running time, 90 minutes.

★ **HUNTED MEN** (28)—One of the gangster cycle with a different twist. A "Jones Family" story with a racy, spicy background of coincidences and gang terror. Well done with names that you can sell—Lloyd Nolan, Lynne Overman, Mary Carlisle. A little extra exploitation will sell this one. Running time, 65 minutes.

R-K-O

★ **VIVACIOUS LADY** (7)—A brilliant comedy with splendid performances by Ginger Rogers and James Stewart, both names with marquee value. One of the best directed pictures of the season. Exhibitors should put the name of George Stevens on their lists of directors whose pictures they want to show. He gives this one general appeal that will live up to all the boosting exhibitors put behind it. Running time, 90 minutes.

★ **BLIND ALIBI** (14)—A badly made picture that will hardly hold up the weak end of a dualer. Pass it by if you can, and if you can't, plug Richard Dix and the dog angle in the picture. Running time, 65 minutes.

★ **GUN LAW** (14)—For the whistle-and-stomp trade. The story is an interesting bit of fiction as far as plotting is concerned, but the plot is the dominant element. There is nothing else to attract a discriminating spectator. George O'Brien makes the hero as convincing as the part could be. Running time, 60 minutes.

TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX

★ **KENTUCKY MOONSHINE** (7)—The Ritz Brothers hit their stride in this one, their personalities registering more effectively than in any previous appearance. Many patrons who have not cared for them in the past will be immensely tickled by the brethren's present antics. Their impersonations of Kentucky mountaineers throughout most of the picture are very clever, and some skits in the finale are bang-up buffoonery. Tony Martin scores with his singing, and the cast is generally capable. Has a slow spot or two, but, everything considered, is a good musical. Running time, 87 minutes.

★ **ONE WILD NIGHT** (14)—The policemen, so commonly the butt of Hollywood humor, get the laugh again, being held up throughout the film as a lot of stupid and dishonest ignoramuses. Patrons who are not perturbed at seeing their public officials ridiculed, however, will find this a diverting little B picture. Action is rapid, there are

sufficient laughs, and Dick Baldwin and June Lang play with freshness and vitality. Running time, 72 minutes.

★ **KIDNAPPED** (28)—One which misses. Slow, plodding, unbelievable, all that Warner Baxter, Freddie Bartholomew and a capable cast can do does not give it substantial box-office rating. Do not let distributor salesmen put over anything on you in the way of selling Century's latest "glamour girl," Arleen Whalen. She has nothing yet; may have later, but I doubt it. Running time, 85 minutes.

UNIVERSAL

★ **SINNERS IN PARADISE** (7)—Feeble stuff. The story is pointless and dull, a hodgepodge of divergent viewpoints and objectives. Characters do not win our interest; nothing much happens. The picture, in which a group of assorted personalities are thrown together on a desert island following the recking of an aeroplane, lends itself to lurid advertising, but most of your patrons would be disappointed. Running time, 65 minutes.

★ **THE LADY IN THE MORGUE** (14)—A smart mystery picture that will please all the fans, and especially those who want to see a fast-moving picture. No special names to sell, but one of the *Thin Man* cycle that is a worthy successor. Running time, 70 minutes.

★ **THE DEVIL'S PARTY** (28)—Story material is rather shallow, vague in intent. The characters do not sufficiently capture our interest to be much concerned over their plight. Much of the action is given over to controversy between them, and the yarn slumps in the middle. The preview audience was evidently restless. Players try hard to make something of their parts, but they have little to work with. Running time, 62 minutes.

UNITED ARTISTS

★ **STORM IN A TEACUP** (7)—Distinguished for its vitality. The sheer momentum the story gathers is truly remarkable. Though the picture decries political tyranny and privilege, its dominant tone is one of whimsicality. Superbly acted. The Scotch dialect of some minor characters becomes a little thick now and then, and the recording is not at all times as meticulous as in American films. But audiences which like good cinema, and have gotten beyond being disconcerted by superficial differences between foreign and American films, will find the picture highly enjoyable.

★ **THE DIVORCE OF LADY X** (14)—If English pictures generally find favor with your audiences, they will like this one. The charm of the piece lies mostly in the debonair and sophisticated spirit in which the story is told. Merle Oberon, Laurence Olivier, and others give good performances. Do not overplay the bedroom situation in advertising, as it is not really very torrid. In technicolor.

★ **COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO** (21)—They are digging up old successes in an effort to plug the holes in the box-office dike, and none should do better in revival than this one. Artistically and technically it is as fresh as if it had been made yesterday. It is outstanding entertainment with all the elements which make for popularity, a picture on a grand scale but with appeal to our elemental emotions. Get behind it and it should perform nicely at your box-office.

WARNER BROTHERS

★ **THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD** (7)—One for the whole family. Full of those joyous deeds of daring and narrow escapes which could not happen but which all

of us have dreamt of doing ourselves. A purely imaginary reincarnation of a mythical Scotch hero, Warners have mounted it magnificently, cast it superbly, and it comes to the screen as a great piece of entertainment. In a measure its success thus far proves the soundness of the Spectator's selling theory presented above in the introduction to this month's resume of last month's reviews. Olivia de Havilland and Errol Flynn are not yet in the Gary Cooper-Shirley Temple box-office class, yet Robin Hood is making money because it is being presented as good entertainment and not as a star vehicle. Running time, 105 minutes.

★ **CRIME SCHOOL** (14)—An engrossing sociological study, ably written, directed and acted, but somewhat over the heads of the ordinary run of picture patrons. Rather drab in theme and locale, but so very well done that it will justify all the exploitation you can give it. In the cast are all the rowdy boys who figured so largely in *Dead End*. That may mean something to your people. Running time, 85 minutes.

★ **GOLD DIGGERS IN PARIS** (21)—Though it has numerous touches of originality and wit, good pace, and a measure of glitter, there are stretches of the film comprised of such fustian, and the story itself is such a propped-up thing, that this can scarcely be rated as an outstanding musical. Rudy Vallee is seen to better advantage than in previous screen appearances, and other members of the cast are in good form. You might hand out cotton, to be plugged in the ears when the shrill Schnickelfritz Band comes on. Running time, 97 minutes.

PREVIEWS

(Continued from page 7)

ula whereby the horse thought to be out of the running rewards the confidence of those who take him in hand by winning the race. However, the youngsters, who were generously represented in the preview audience, having come also to see *Judge Hardy's Children*, were intensely stimulated by the proceedings, clapped and roared no end. Spectators with maturity of outlook, though, are likely to turn thumbs down. This exclusive appeal of the film I view as a production fault.

Kids Would Understand . . .

THERE is no reason why a picture of this kind could not be made to appeal to both children and mature persons. I am sure that, had the characters been written and directed to act like human beings, and the situations more carefully developed, invested with greater conviction and emotional potency, no kid would have scratched his head and complained, "I can't understand what this is all about." It is not that the race-track formula is at fault, for it has been used to create many interesting films in the past, and, given imaginative treatment, will be used to make many good films in the future. Treatment is everything.

No Stinting with Sound . . .

ANOTHER shortcoming of this picture is that it is created according to a prevalent theory that a talking picture can only live up to its name by talking or making a noise almost incessantly. During a period of several minutes, and when scenes were

changing quickly, I watched to see if anyone stopped talking for as long as three seconds. They didn't. When nothing remains to be said in English, some of the characters shout at each other in Italian; and in one scene, Chick Chandler, having to enter a room, fills in the lull by making a curious noise with his fingers against his lips. The film fairly cries for background music, and when some of the characters take up instruments and play a musical number toward the middle of the story, the effect is like putting hot, dry lips to a cool brook. The extent to which music can enhance a film of this sort was demonstrated a few months ago in *Sergeant Murphy*, a picture similar in story. Not that *Speed To Burn* would stack up with the earlier film anyway; it lacks the human values.

Juvenile Actor Impresses . . .

MARVIN STEPHENS, appearing as a jockey with a deep devotion to the discarded horse, is a talented young actor. Would that his role had given him greater emotional latitude. Michael Whalen plays with his usual poise and elegance, though if he is a police officer, I'm a duck's uncle. Lynn Bari is agreeable of personality, if not playing with very great imagination; and she should not curl her eyelashes till they look like shavings. Sidney Blackmer, after his splendid performance in *Heidi*, is back in a groove, doing his stint as a villain. Henry Armetta, Chick Chandler and others are competent. Outstanding is young Johnnie Pirrone, who plays with considerable vigor and conviction. Otto Brower directed. Jerry Hoffman, associate producer, was noted as a hard-boiled critic when he wrote for a local newspaper; used to dismiss B's with a few words.

HONOR FOR MARTIN QUIGLEY

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY at Los Angeles, will confer the degree of Doctor of Literature on Martin Quigley, publisher of *Motion Picture Herald* and *Motion Picture Daily*, at the seventy-second annual commencement exercises, Sunday, June 12th. The honor is being conferred primarily because of the fine service to both pictures and the public that Martin has done in connection with the formulation and the enforcement of the Production Code which has been instrumental in keeping the moral tone of the screen on a high level. The *Spectator* applauds the action of the university in thus recognizing Martin's services.

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RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD
of
MABEL KEEFER

AFTER reading Editor Beaton's description of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado—no, that is not right—he did not attempt to describe it. Starting again: After reading what Editor Beaton writes about the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, I am wondering if it would be possible to film it in a manner that would bring us not only its beauty and grandeur, but something of its spiritual vibrancy? Even though the film must fall far short of the Canyon itself, it would be an achievement to bring as much as possible to the millions who will never see it otherwise. A musical background? I tremble to think of it, but if it were done by a master—yes, perhaps a master musician might do it after he had steeped himself in the spiritual majesty of the Canyon itself and spent hours studying the film. . . . And I think he would need to spend some time in prayer.

* * *

HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON quotes a sentence in the original French which he says should be engraved in enduring stone over the entrance gates to all our conservatories of music:

Quie de sentiment ne fait

Son dit et son chant contrefait.

He then gives us this delightful translation: "He who writes or composes without the true inner fire, without himself feeling the emotion he tries to describe, he had better not say anything at all, for he will always be a phony."

* * *

LESLIE HOWARD'S statement that films attract him more than anything else on earth, and that "their potentialities are limitless," has the effect of a tonic on me. When an actor of Leslie Howard's calibre feels like that toward motion pictures, it is going to mean something vital in the development of screen art.

* * *

AS I entered a motion picture theatre last night I found myself walking with a spring in my step and a feeling that I might execute a fancy dance step any minute. What caused it? A Disney *Silly Symphony* was being shown on the screen, and the lilt in the music immediately permeated my being. There also were some soft passages of unusual loveliness that delighted me. That, my friends, is a psychological effect that reaches all the way to the box-office.

* * *

QUITE a long time seems to have elapsed since the editor of the *Spectator* last tormented his readers with mention of "one of Mrs. Spectator's lemon pies." Wonder if she has not been making them, or,

if he has developed a new sense of kindness toward his fellow men.

* * *

WHAT a convenient alibi that word "probably" is—especially for the weather man.

* * *

AN EDITORIAL in the *Country Gentleman* has this to say: "We specialize on geography and people. We want to see a unified America, dominated neither by the city nor by the country, but where mutual respect and understanding is the prevailing order. . . . And, in a world as troubled as this world is today, it is incumbent upon every businessman to begin a sympathetic first-hand study of America and its people." Can you think of any medium that could give greater aid to the realization of such an idea than the screen? Now please do not bring Martin Quigley into the picture! I still do not believe he speaks for the film industry as a whole. (But I wish to goodness someone connected with the industry would say something—or has it been said?) In the same editorial, Mr. Rose, the editor, speaking of things he learned as a boy, says: "I also learned woodcraft, how if I always kept three points in line I would never travel in a circle, never lose my direction in the forest." What a fine short subject could be made showing all these things—giving valuable information—with the scenic beauty of the forest and a musical background that would suggest that it was being invoked by the spirits of the forces of nature.

* * *

RECIPROCAL disapproval! I like the sound of that and I think I shall carry some with me to put in my eyes in an emergency—use it as Bert Harlen used it on the man who sat next to him. (*Spectator* of May 21.)

* * *

CATO, whoever he was (a philosopher, perhaps?), is credited with saying, "I think the first virtue is to restrain the tongue." But that is where Editor Beaton got his idea of having a minimum of dialogue in motion pictures.

* * *

RATHER interesting the comment of Paul Vincent Carroll, author of the play *Shadow and Substance*, anent American newspapermen. He is quoted as saying: "They are fine lads. Not at all like the newspapermen in the films."

* * *

MY HEART STOOD STILL—when I read in the editor's Mental Meanderings that Throgmorton had turned out to be celery, but resumed its pumping when I found that "no part of Throgmorton will be eaten."

* * *

AC.I.O. strike, affecting twenty-seven hundred employes, is in progress in one of our large manufacturing concerns, and the lines of picketing men and women walking round and round in circles seem to be symbolic of the general condition of the country.

BELOW THE WASTE

By Don Quixote

GLASS BRICKS—\$45,000 . . .

THE revolution in North Hollywood which saw many heads roll in the mud is happily about over. Charles R. Rogers has paid the penalty for some rather unfortunate decisions, and no matter what oil the studio may gush on trade paper waters, New York interests objected to highhanded extravagances on the West Coast. It was inevitable that the trouble had to be scotched. Don Quixote takes no personal satisfaction in anything that happened. He has misgivings, if anything, for there are many whose heads also rolled who were entirely innocent. The Jacksonian principle—to the victor—still holds true. Hollywood well knows the ins and outs. It is therefore something of a tragedy that capital should make the change, and that friends of one order should make way for friends of another.

Glass Bricks For Sale . . .

ONE of the traditions around Universal City is that you and you and you can pick up glass bricks for your newly redecorated home for a song. It seems, according to rumor, that Mr. Rogers ordered some \$45,000 worth of glass bricks for a cinematic fiasco called *Top of the Town*. Of these but \$9.00 worth actually appeared in the release print of the picture. The computations are so exact due to the efforts of one of the underlings of the accounting department who did the figuring as a lark. It was an expensive pastime, of course, and the final story was indeed a sad one. However, Universal, for a time, was called "House of Glass." Not because the insiders could not look out, and the outsiders could look in, but because at least a dozen pictures that emanated from that studio featured glass bricks. For many weeks glass bricks were cheaper than cheap compo board, ordinarily used in the making of sets. One little man with secret architectural ambitions all of his own, even furnished himself a barbecue pit on his Valley ranch with the transparent spoils of that debacle.

Extra, Extra and Extra . . .

THE Rogers *hors de combats* is now a matter of history. However, it might be wise to use some of the information that tradition has handed down as a sort of blue print. During the filming of the aforementioned gargantuan set, Art Director John Harkrider, under orders, designed a night club expanse so big that Brother Rogers had to invite about four hundred extra extras to fill the place up. And the fact that the producer did not see eye to eye with the director on the dance sequences; the fact that a special camera crane had to be built to take it all in; and the fact that hundreds of extras were sitting around for many moons waiting for something to happen, did not help much in lowering costs. Don't get me wrong. I am all for the extras. I think a picture like *Top of the Town* would eventually ease the Film Fund out of existence.

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

MUSICIANS generally, not only those affiliated with the picture industry, will appreciate the fact that Producer Walter Wanger salutes also composer Werner Janssen "for his splendid symphonic musical score" when acknowledging in the preface to the preview program for *Blockade* the collaboration of his principal co-workers. It is a rare occasion when a film executive remembers his composer, especially in this public fashion. However, Producer Wanger, by the very subject and challenging tenor of his screen creation, demonstrates that he possesses individuality and courage of conviction. Wanger says nothing new when he states that "a motion picture is the co-ordination of many minds and talents. Each element depends upon another." Needless to reiterate at length, the musical minds often are called in late into production conference and work. I fancy this has not been the case in this instance. At any rate, believing as I do in the important scope and future of film music, I am personally grateful to Walter Wanger for this statement. He was wise in choosing a Werner Janssen for this task, because this young American has evinced on other occasions his own individuality as a man and artist. Janssen must have been thoroughly in harmony with what one might call the editorial purpose of a film which sounds a stern and stirring denunciation of war waged ruthlessly abroad against non-combatants at this very hour.

Not a Subtle Subject . . .

A WAR picture is hardly ever an easy assignment for a composer. I am not aware of Editor Beaton's comment on the screen virtues of *Blockade*, but my present reaction is that it lacks in subtlety of idea, action or dialogue. Apropos of dialogue and background music, Composer Janssen and that ever faithful and sensitive worker behind the scene, Irvin Talbot, who conducted and recorded the technically difficult score, the proportion of musical dynamics in relation to the spoken word is unfailingly deft. Music never beclouds speech, although upon first impression I am not sure whether some dialogue, such as the confession of the girl spy, would not have been bettered by a musical background, while at other moments the absence of music would not have been felt. Altogether music has been recorded with high fidelity for tonal timbres. In as much Janssen frequently uses a Debussyesque, almost vapour-light color of sound, quite superior standards of orchestration, orchestral performance, recording and dubbing were required. A war picture indeed is not a pleasant task for a composer. To express the tension, horror and pathos of the subject he has relatively little choice. Either he writes somewhat in the manner Richard Strauss's *Hero's Life* with its super-Lisztian aplomb, or he turns to the more modern Debussy-Stravinsky style of impressionistic technic. Janssen preferred chiefly the latter method. Occasion-

ally he resorted to the former. Momentarily he waxes superficially operatic when a well-schooled chorus is heard from aboard a feed relief ship as that vessel has broken the blockade. Excellent singing from rough sailors in the danger zone!

Finesse and Meaning . . .

I SEEMED to sense a certain lack of conviction at various times, although I am by no means unmindful of the actual quality of Janssen's music. He is not a conventional melody maker. I could not help asking myself why a simple shepherd should play a tune which sounds like an afterthought inspired by the opening flute solo in Debussy's *Afternoon of a Faun*. Would not a simple, unmodernized Spanish folktune have been better? The score as a whole sounds heterogeneous in that respect. Spanish music of the traditional type in the fashion of Granados or Albeniz is placed between bits of Debussyesque or Honeggerish nature reveries. In the finale one heard fanfares of Brahms-Wagner-Strauss type. The title music did not impress me as significant. A theme, perhaps of the Spanish "mother earth", for low woodwinds, sounded engaging and meaningful. Combination of bells and chord effects proved fine. The grotesque distortion of dance music in the bombardment-frantic city proved of telling effect. The chorus of people again impressed me as rather operatic. There were fine transitions such as from the church into the world of reality. Janssen looked deeply into tragedy-filled eyes of war-tortured womanhood. By way of suggestion—because the audience does not actually see the sinking of the first food ship—Janssen succeeded admirably. Using descending tremolo chords and a touch of woodwind, he told not only of an actual event, but also let his hearer look in the hearts of the starved civilians, whose hope for help sank with the boat. Music thus illustrated also an emotional void. Janssen more than once thus evinced skill and sensitivity. All in all, he merits well Producer Wanger's praise for setting music to an unsubtle picture.

The Composer's Approach . . .

THERE are two ways of setting the musical character of a film score. One is to write music of the style or taste as the persons in the play would choose to express themselves, if they were real and had the opportunity of doing so. The other way is that of the composer who puts himself in the position of a commentator reflecting aloud about what the figures on the screen think, or do. If the composer should incline to use a melodic and harmonic idiom more modern, more sophisticated than the personages of the play, the music, fine as it may be in itself, will be a psychological study in terms of tone on the subject of the film, rather than be part of, or, in a broad sense, an accompaniment to the film. Thus the human and musical adaptability of the composer will be

tried and found sufficient, or wanting. The natural idiom of the composer may be one far more sophisticated or subtle than that of the screen characters. He will have to write of greater inner veracity and intensity to bridge this difference. Max Steiner has achieved this admirably during certain scenes of *Zola*, while on the whole he has managed a splendid compromise in combining both methods, if methods they be called. For the most part, Korngold, although a modernist at times, has chosen the first approach and with superb results, both from a human-dramatic and a generally artistic angle.

Double Viewpoint . . .

CHARLES PREVIN, the music director at Universal, had the wisdom, and perhaps also the courage, to write a score for *Wives Under Suspicion* which would appeal, no doubt, to the district attorney, his spouse and their friends, could they be the judges rather than the subjects of the music. It may be true that in the general trend of things the proverbial saying that all ways lead to Rome, is true. That does not hold good in the world of film music. There must be musical application and definite tonal commentary from within, paralleling less or more closely the visual message of the screen. Previn finds it best to choose music of a genre which might be chosen should the district attorney's wife turn on the radio, or if her college friends were to voice their preferences. That is musical commentary from within. Previn finds it prudent also to remove himself a little, and deal in terms of general atmosphere, such as during the tense moment when an anonymous hand turns the switch linking the power house with the electric chair. This entire sequence of suspense would be hard to bear except for the somewhat march-like, climactically mounting music. Previn showed sensible restraint. He did not compose a piece of music in the fashion of Berlioz' expletive *March to the Scaffold*. But it translated sufficiently the clumsy grinding of the millstones of modern justice.

Tonal Double Exposure . . .

IAM not sure whether *Wives Under Suspicion* does not contain scenes which would be just as expressive without music, while in some, music might definitely express the unspoken feelings or thoughts of one or the other screen characters, as one or the other becomes alienated, or suspicious. In other words, music need not speak for everything that occurs (or does not happen, in terms of action or reaction) on the screen. It can speak for one figure only, or it can provide musical atmosphere for A. and B. against which C. is juxtaposed or only silhouetted. Music can express emotions or thoughts of opposite tendencies at the same time. It is in this possibility that music can render such great service to a producer-director who realizes that too much talking ruins the talkies. More in that sense could have been made of the scene where the District Attorney finds his wife in what he imagines an objectionably sympathetic attitude with their friend on the terrace. I might call

this procedure thematic double exposure in music. Previn has created a fine piece of background music for the confession scene and he may well share in the spontaneous plaudits of the preview audience. The recording generally is very good, and background music treated with effective evenness speaks the language spoken by the dramatist and his dramatist personæ.

Illustrative Score . . .

TITLE music in a film is, in a sense, as important as a prelude to a play or to an opera. The relation is the same, especially as in modern opera, since in the film the prelude usually leads directly into the first act. Composers of today usually write short preludes which are not so much summaries of the principal melodic contents of a lyric drama, but briefly and potently prepare for the opening scene. Considerable thought has been given by Frank Waxman to the title of MGM's *Three Comrades*. I would not venture to translate his meanings, but following the striking fanfares of the opening bars, there followed two changes of moods, just as the warmly colorful score is replete with contrasts and finely supplementary sound-episodes. The tale of *Three Comrades* is a stirring one of loving loyalty among three men, tested by a girl's love for one of them. Born a "war baby" she dies young, and one of three is killed when ballots are fought with bullets. Waxman treats the picture as an illustrator would decorate a magazine story, graphically, brightly, in the tempo and the abruptness of the quickly changing situations.

Excellent Detail . . .

WAXMAN stays on the realistic side of the picture, although an effect such as the whispering of the telephone wires is eminently well managed. Music is variously employed to better visual effects. Thus the phonograph grinding out the wedding march runs down in the middle of the impromptu. A clever commentary on life is worked in when one of the comrades corners and shoots it out with his friend's killer, who finally tries to find entrance into a cathedral. Shots crash while from within comes the joyously blissful sound of a chorus intoning the "Halleluiahs" from Handel's *Messiah*. There is also a well sung choral end-title, but as it is in keeping with the quite unrealistic close to a realistic picture, I can hardly scold the musician. More character might perhaps been given to the band music accompanying the procession of the fascist group. On the other hand, Waxman has caught the folk spirit in the informal singing of the "three." One of the musically and technically best scenes is also the farewell scene in the sanitarium. Waxman permits his own music to sag and to become warped as the girl's strength ebbs. I could not help but think of Strauss' *Death and Transfiguration*, although I do not make this reference in a critical sense. I think Frank Waxman has written genuinely, although the subject has been worn thin since Verdi composed the last act of *La Traviata*.

Frances Marion Writes for Writers

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

ONE day at the *Spectator* office Editor Beaton informed me that he had received a copy of a new book by Frances Marion, entitled *How to Write and Sell Film Stories*, and that when he had finished glancing it over he would like me to review it. Days passed and it had made no appearance at the office; at last I gleaned from stray comments in his editorial column that the book had found its way onto the night stand at the side of his bed, and that he was not merely glancing it over, but really reading it. When the work finally came into my hands, I began one afternoon to glance it over, but the book soon found its way onto my night stand and I too really read it. Frances Marion's work is that kind of a book. Based upon a long and rich experience in the motion picture field, it is one of the most comprehensive and pregnant books of its kind yet written, both from the viewpoints of artistic theory and revelation of the inner workings of the film industry.

Apt Quotations Abound . . .

THE absorbing story of how film stories are written, or should be written, and how they may be sold, is told in an admirable easy-flowing prose, adding greatly to the readability of the book. Further literary tone is lent its pages by abounding quotations of prominent writers, from Cicero to Shaw, all meaty and apropos, and reflecting a broad personal culture. Each chapter is prefaced by one or more quotations of this sort. Several of them have crept into my notebook. Within the chapters there is no phase of writing and selling screen plays I can think of that has not been touched upon. Characterization, plot building, dialogue, dramaturgy all come in for discussion, sometimes with penetrating analysis. And such practical matters as the operation of writers' agents, including a list of reputable ones, plagiarism, and the legal protection an author can secure, are dealt with. A full scenario of Marco Polo, by Robert Sherwood, is appended. There is really a colossal amount of theory and factual knowledge contained in the book.

Appeal Should Be Wide . . .

IT IS this comprehensiveness that should insure the work a wide circle of readers. Novices will find there about everything that can be formulated and conveyed relative to screen play writing; scribes with experience in the fiction or other fields will be rewarded with much that should help them adapt their talents to the new medium; old hands at film writing will discover crystallized there many of their own reflections and experiences—and possibly even a new concept or two. Of just what value the many-faceted theoretical content of the book will be to novices I would not presume to say. Certainly one could not keep in mind all of the manifold principles and contentions when undertaking to write a screen play.

Vividness, originality, and good dramaturgy—emphasis, proportion, and the like—can be gotten into a script in only one way, through sensing them. In the final analysis, we do not know exactly how we do anything, and especially is this true of creative work. Probably this material would be of value to no one who was incapable of discerning its essence ultimately for himself, through practice at screen writing. The value of any principles lies in their power to suggest, to mould our faculties. But talent cannot be taught.

Author Is Down to Earth . . .

FRANCES MARION is not artistically high-flown in her purpose, however, her extensive theorizing being directed at purely commercial ends. She states candidly that, "At present the film story comes nearer to being written to formula than does any other type of writing." And she is of the opinion that "an original plot is never as essential or, in fact, as salable as is fresh and original treatment of a plot that has proved popular. As a matter of fact, film stories are rejected for poor structure and undesirable subject-matter far more frequently than for lack of originality." She knows the picture game and writes of it realistically, at least from an artistic standpoint. In fact, one is led to wonder sometimes if her matter-of-fact depiction of conditions as they are does not hold some rationalization in their favor. She believes it "distinctly unwise" for a writer to assume that the group intelligence of the average picture audience is low. "It cannot be said with any degree of reason that to wish to see pleasant things and be made happy is a sign of mental inferiority." True, but the way in which one seeks these things may be indicative.

Views Are Rather Charitable . . .

AND this brings me to what, in my opinion, is the one shortcoming of the book. Miss Marion tends to look at Hollywood and the motion picture set-up in general through slightly rose-colored glasses. Perhaps her long residence here and her association with the industry since the early days have resulted in her viewing it with a certain fondness and charity. Perhaps her participation in the activities of a local university during the writing of the work influenced its tone. There is a tendency in scholastic instruction to imbue professions and the world at large with greater logic and system than they actually possess. Everything considered, this may be advantageous in academic work, since it allows the student to retain undampened optimism and determination; but it is nevertheless misleading. Be that as it may, Miss Marion's book manifests somewhat the same tendency, lending to the present set-up of the motion picture industry a rather flattering degree of sense, especially with respect to its purchase and production of screen stories.

Profession Is Precarious . . .

WE IN Hollywood know that there isn't much sense to motion picture processes. Writing for the screen is almost as precarious a profession as acting, unless one has become entrenched through long success or by social or political connections. The rank and file of readers at the studios are incompetent to judge good screen material if they see it. And this is no "sour grapes" impression, your reviewer having never written a screen story, preferring to devote his spare time to a branch of literary endeavor which he hopes eventually will prove more surely profitable. It is commonly conceded that most of the outstanding screen successes adapted from published fiction or the stage, would never have reached the screen had they been submitted as original manuscripts. Something of an understatement, then, is the single and quiet sentence, "Some of the studios pay sufficient salaries to get readers of education and experience, but others, unfortunately for themselves and for the public, pay small amounts and often are obliged to employ readers lacking in background and education and unable to recognize drama unless in stereotyped situations."

Things Aspirants Should Know . . .

IT IS altogether likely that a writing aspirant, if through prolonged and arduous labor he acquires the skill of writing good material and then can back

up this accomplishment with almost superhuman confidence and courage, would be able to create a place for himself in the Hollywood scheme of things. But it would be invaluable to the aspirant to know what he had to go through before he attained his objective. And it would also be valuable for him to know what working conditions he could expect to encounter once he attained his niche. Some might even like to know about what artistic integrity would mean for them. These should be told what all of us in Hollywood know, that the vast majority of writers here are "selling themselves short," that for every Frances Marion or Dudley Nichols there are ten hacks. There might have been quoted a conversation such as one which comes to mind, the likes of which Miss Marion would probably be able to recall several, in which one well-known screen writer endeavored to discourage another well-known writer from bothering to incorporate a more or less profound concept into his script. "Wise up," said the former. "I figure I have to put in an hour a day working. I don't like it, but it's better than driving a truck." Or the aspirants might have been permitted to sit in on one of the inquisitorial story conferences at a studio, in which the merit of a story is supposed to be determined by the author's success in defending it against the ravenous attempts of the others at the table to tear it to pieces. All this would have been valuable for the aspirant to know.

DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS, Jr.

in

"The Rage of Paris"

UNIVERSAL

ANDREW STONE

DIRECTOR

PARAMOUNT

Hollywood

10 CENTS

SPECTATOR

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—June 18, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 10

Now We Can Expect a Parade of Pictures
Pleading the Cause of Peace

Just Two Years Ago To-Day the Spectator
Urged Films Opposed to War

Producers Propose To Use Tom-Toms To Do
What Picture Brains Should Do

Bruno Ussher Wants an Organization To
Protect Picture Critics' Ears

... REVIEWS ...

THE RAGE OF PARIS ★ COWBOY FROM BROOKLYN ★ HAVING A WONDERFUL TIME
KEEP SMILING ★ BORDER G-MEN

... USSHER'S MUSIC REVIEWS ...

White Banners ★ The Rage of Paris ★ Three Blind Mice ★ Mysterious Mr. Moto

ONLY PUBLICATION IN THE WORLD DEVOTED
EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM

FRANK McDONALD

Director

(Excerpts from Hollywood Spectator Picture Reviews)

Midnight Court—

Frank McDonald quite evidently knows more about direction than most of his conferees.

Love Begins At Twenty—

McDonald again proves he is above inclusion in the army of ordinary directors.

The Song of a Nation—

McDonald gives this little masterpiece inspired direction.

Isle of Fury—

McDonald's direction has the valuable quality of revealing no traces of his efforts.

Smart Blonde—

Direction that has not been excelled by any of the big time directors.

Over the Wall—

All the characters in the story are made human and understandable by the consummate skill McDonald displays in his direction. He is one of the young directors who some day will be doing big things.

Murder By An Aristocrat—

He demonstrates the value of movement to screen entertainment, the wisdom of headlong speed to hold the attention of the audience. He gives us a **motion** picture.

Boulder Dam—

Possessing a sure touch, sensitiveness, appreciation of drama and comedy, a sound, sensible grasp of the fundamentals of picture entertainment, he has performed wonders with the material given him.

The Big Noise—

Wisely, McDonald has introduced no unique appliances in the telling of his story, his style being simple, smooth, brisk.

Dance, Charlie, Dance—

Other of his productions have demonstrated his appreciation of the value of dialogue carried on in ordinary conversational tones.

Her Husband's Secretary—

There is not another director in the business who could have improved upon the manner in which the story is told.

Adventurous Blonde—

McDonald reveals a style that is quite his own—brisk, staccato, brittle; with a rapid tempo of the story movement and a very alive sense of comedy.

Reckless Living—

Presents us with a group of people and enlists our interest in them by the simple expedient of presenting them as people and not as actors.



From the EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

SPECTATOR AND ANTI-WAR FILMS . . .

ON THE front cover of the *Hollywood Spectator* issue of December 18 last, there was in large type: "We Pledge Services of One Million People to Draw the Attention of the World to an Anti-War Picture if Hollywood Has One Producer Who is Wise Enough to See that by Serving The Cause of Peace He Can Benefit Mankind and Gain Enormous Profit." The million workers we pledged are now at-work drawing the attention of the world to *Blockade*, the anti-war picture made by Walter Wanger, the first producer who was wise enough to see that by serving the cause of peace he could benefit mankind and at the same time gain enormous profit. And now another producer is trying to accumulate enough courage to make a picture of the stage play, *It Can't Happen Here*, which takes a crack at dictators. The picture would have been made a couple of years ago if Will Hays had not feared it might irritate Messrs. Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin. If the Hays thought process were extended logically, it would embrace the banning of crime pictures because murderers and gangsters would not like them. "The sole mission of the screen is to entertain. . . . Film executives do not envision themselves as teachers," according to Martin Quigley, D. L.

Producer Changes His Mind . . .

BUT now things are changed. *Blockade* has broken the blockade and put life into the blockheads. The anti-war pictures for which the *Spectator* has pleaded for the past two years, are going to be made. Because I knew how he would explain his reversal of attitude, I called up the production head of one of the major studios and asked him why he was looking for peace stories now in view of the fact that only six months ago he told me that any kind of propaganda pictures would be box-office flops. He did not disappoint me; he ran true to producer form by patiently explaining to me that when I first began to urge the making of peace propaganda films the public was not ready for them, that there has been a sudden revolution in public opinion, thus making such films good box-office now. I reminded him of the letter I wrote him on May 18, 1936, and his reply that he could "not see there is any demand for such a picture as you suggest." My letter was a plea for a peace picture. I wrote the same letter to the

head of each studio. Each of them replied in the same terms as the one I quote. Walter Wanger answered, "I would not be interested in making a picture based on this theme." His *Blockade*, released two years after I suggested the theme, is his final answer.

Reader Response Astonishing . . .

MARY BORN, of Columbus, Ohio, wrote me a letter which was published in the *Spectator* of November 6, 1937. It was a plea to Charlie Chaplin to make an anti-war picture in which his Little Man would represent humanity. The *Spectator* introduced the letter with a plea of its own, which began, "Shoulder arms, Charlie Chaplin! The world needs your Little Man now as it never needed him before." The reader response astonished me. It was virtually explosive. Letters poured in until every state in the Union and most of the provinces of Canada were represented in the files and the files overflowed into cartons. The Chaplin studio staff also was astonished. The Chaplin *Spectator* goes directly to Charlie at his residence and his office knew nothing of the peace plea, consequently could not understand the extraordinary increase in the incoming mail. When Alf Reeves, Charlie's manager, learned what it was all about, he phoned to ask me if the *Spectator* circulation ran into the millions. I let him think so, but since have relented and informed him that Miss Born's letter and my comments on it were republished in the bulletins of all the leading organizations which are waging a war on war. It is only now, picture producers plead, that the public is peace-picture minded. The *Spectator* files tell a different story. It is the business of the film industry to anticipate the demands of the public. My May 18, 1936, letter to producers indicates that I anticipated the state of public sentiment which will make *Blockade* a terrific box-office success, but I am not a three thousand-dollar-a-week film executive. If I were, I would have no knowledge of what the public wants, but I would have a darned good hunch about the sixth race at Inglewood on Saturday afternoon.

What Might Have Been . . .

ONE cannot even begin to estimate the extent of the human suffering which might have been avoided if one of the producers I wrote to two years ago to

the day this *Spectator's* date line carries, had set about then to make such a picture as *Blockade*. The stirring of public opinion, crystallizing public sentiment — humanity's greatest force — until it made peace a militant foe of war, by this time might have ended the Spanish murders, might have prevented Japan's bloody invasion of China and made insane Europe think in terms of sanity. But the film industry thought there was no money in it then, although in my letter I expressed my opinion that such a picture as I envisioned would be the outstanding box-office production of all time. Now the industry sees money in it, and soon we will be watching the parade of peace pictures go by. What the film industry would not do for people, it now will do for profit. The history of its delay is written in human blood, is blotted by the tears of human suffering.

Two-Year-Old Opinion . . .

THE letter I submitted to the leading producers two years ago this week, said, in part: "Mankind's chief menace is now in the public mind, is the subject of more serious thinking than ever before in history. War is being debunked. A race is on between the debunking process, the champions of peace, and the inevitable next world war if peace efforts fail. The universal yearning for lasting peace, the final elimination of war; the awakening of society to the absurdity of war and its failure to settle anything finally, combine to form the only worldwide theme available for treatment on the screen, the only theme the entire world would accept eagerly, the only one which has individual significance to every country on the globe. And the screen is the only medium which can handle the tremendous subject in an appropriately tremendous manner, which can give it the terrific impact necessary to drive it home. It is possible to make a plea for peace the greatest motion picture the screen has presented or ever can present—the greatest single instrument for peace ever designed—the greatest blessing ever conferred on mankind. If it realizes all its possibilities, it should be the greatest box-office production of all time. A picture based on what the whole world is thinking about must have worldwide appeal. It is not the screen's mission to preach, and I do not suggest making a sermon of the picture, for sermons are not good box-office. There need not be one foot of verbal argument in the picture as I see it, not one word uttered against war by a major character. My whole idea is to strip war of its glamour and let the world see it for what it is—a ghastly manifestation of man's incapacity to live as sanely as the beasts and birds, the plants and trees and all other things nature created. The camera, not the microphone, would convey the message."

* * *

ANYWAY, A GOOD IDEA . . .

THE idea really was a brilliant one, but it was turned down on the plea that it would take the minds of picture people off the more important matter of picking the winners. He applied for space for the erection of a booth at the Inglewood race track, his idea being to stock it with books, plays and

stories to simplify the hunt for screen material by assembling it at the point where the customers foregather. As a sideline he also wanted to install a projection room where daily rushes could be viewed between races, but it was felt that that, too, would be a distraction, that one cannot concentrate on the next race choices when he is disturbed by what is on the screen.

* * *

THINKING OF WHOOPING IT UP . . .

THE film industry, not content with employing comedians, is about to turn comedian itself. As all good comedy should be played, the industry is going to dead-pan its own efforts, going to be serious about it, but the role it intends playing will be none the less ridiculous on that account. According to *Variety* (N. Y.) the picture business is going to conduct "a back-to-the-box-office ballyhoo with the idea of making America more film-minded." Going into particulars, *Variety* explains the act: "Picture industry envisions enlisting the stars directly all through the year, starting with the September tee-off, in a plan to have them address the film fan direct, via their radio programs, since so many film personalities have interlocking celluloid and kilocycle interests. Still another thought to crystallize the move would be something along the lines of a mammoth train expedition from Hollywood across the country, with numerous stopoffs as part of the steam-up in behalf of b.o."

Queer Way to Improve Business . . .

WHEN producers initiate a movement "with the idea of making America more film-minded" than it is as present, it runs the danger of dissipating what strength the box-office has left. The film-mindedness of the public already is responsible for its turning down nine-tenths of the pictures offered it. The industry's contemplated tom-tom beating may be taken as suggesting its own satisfaction with the pictures it is making and its conviction that all the box-office needs for its stimulation is a clamorous reminder to the public that Hollywood still is making screen entertainment. It is rather laughable. If Hollywood were making the kind of pictures the public wants, there would be no box-office slump, but instead of giving thought to the production of such pictures, Hollywood proposes to expend its energy in ballyhooing the product the public has demonstrated it does not want. Reminding customers that there is still on the market a line of goods they have tested and found wanting, is rather a queer way of drumming up business. In the jungle natives beat tom-toms to exorcise the evil spirits of their conception, but I am afraid the same method will not prove efficacious in the case of the film theatre box-office. A more intellectual approach is required if the picture problem is to be solved.

One Question Answered . . .

HOLLYWOOD studios are well staffed with experts who speedily can give answers to any questions asked them. Which pyramid was completed first? How thick is the ice at the North Pole? How

EASING THE SUMMER BURDEN

WHEN, in the September 11 issue of the *Spectator* it was announced that after ten years of publication as a bi-weekly, it thereafter would be a weekly, we forgot to add "except during July and August of each year." During these two summer months sensible people do not wish to spend too much time in serious mental occupation. Another consideration is that the hundreds of schools and colleges which use the *Spectator* in their Motion Picture Appreciation classes, are closed for the summer. And—if you want the real low-down—I find that writing any share of a *Spectator* every week is about the nearest approach to perpetual motion the world has achieved. In me is a deep yearning for even one day of sitting in the shade of a tree, blinking at nothing whatever and thinking of even less.

So, during July and August hereafter you will get a *Spectator* every two weeks instead of every week, and, because we failed to warn you of it, your current subscription will be extended to include the fifty-two issues you paid for when you renewed your subscription for, or subscribed during, the current year.

All the pictures previewed during the two months will be reviewed as usual, the only difference being that they will come to you in bi-weekly batches, instead of weekly. And for each issue I will get back into my Easy Chair just long enough to keep from going stale. For the rest of the time I will do nothing as violently as I can.

many square feet of floor space in the Kremlin? What kind of lining in Julius Caesar's robes? How many varieties of flowers in Anne Hathaway's garden? Such questions are child's play for the studio experts. A palace can be erected and furnished overnight, and the bottom of a coal mine shaft can be prepared for shooting while cast and director are having lunch. I related once before the incident of the property man who was told to provide a whirlpool and a jar of marmalade, and was worried because he thought there was no marmalade on the lot. In twelve years of close contact with motion picture production I have learned that the only thing you cannot get in a studio is an answer to the question: What is a motion picture?

Public Demonstrates Its Preference . . .

WHERE "film mindedness" is most in need of cultivation is in Hollywood studios. It is within their confines that the tom-toms should be beaten; theirs alone is the task of giving renewed life to the box-office. The starting point is the birth of the motion picture. Why did it, in a brief half century, almost completely eliminate as an entertainment factor the living theatre with its more than thirty cen-

turies of existence? Both the stage and screen are story-telling mediums. The former tells its stories in dialogue, appeals to the emotions through the intellect. The latter, in its first decades, told its stories in silence, appealed to the emotions through the visual sense, did not invite the cooperation of the intellect. The stage exercised the intellect; the screen gave the intellect a rest. That the public preferred the screen, preferred the visual form of entertainment, was demonstrated by the establishment of one or more film theatres in every center of population and the confining of the living theatre to only the largest cities. The film industry never could have grown great on the revenue obtained from those who preferred stage entertainment to that provided by the screen.

Are Quite Gay About It . . .

WHAT happened when the screen was given what the stage had possessed and it had lacked—a voice? The screen began at once to imitate the form of entertainment it had supplanted, to give wider circulation to the form the public had abandoned in favor of the form which Hollywood then abandoned. At first, of course, the novelty of the talking picture proved a strong drawing power; the *Spectator* at the time said it would, but scores of times it warned the industry that novelty itself lacked lasting box-office strength, and predicted the situation which now has arisen. Anyone with an ounce of picture brains could see what inevitably would happen, and also can see that the cure for the present box-office sickness does not lie in a cross-country chase of a trainload of whooper-uppers for things as they are. The microphone could have been made a convenient device for supplanting printed titles and providing musical backgrounds, but it has been used as a lethal device by executives who are paid weekly salaries of thousands of dollars each to keep the motion picture industry alive. But they are a gay crowd, the executives. Their contemplated peppering-up procedure brings to my mind a line from Ludlow's *Hasheesh Eater*: "The lethal torpor of my mind was replaced by an airy activity."

* * *

PRODUCERS WILL BEAR WATCHING . . .

EVERY time film producers are confronted with a situation requiring concerted action in dealing with talent or other studio groups, they toss diplomacy out the window and proceed to do everything possible to create ill feeling between the studios and the groups concerned. It is unnecessary to point out the continual fumbling of studio-talent problems by the producers during the past 10 years. In every instance millions of dollars have been lost to the industry; but far more important is the continual turmoil engendered by producers' opposition to recognition of any group or organization until forced to do so. Which brings up the present situation of the writers, and the decision of the National Labor Relations Board calling for vote of the writers to select their own bargaining organization. The board ruling was secured after many months of plugging by the Screen Writers' Guild. Despite the Labor Board

decision, I read in the trade press that the producers are conferring with their attorneys with the idea of appealing the decision and carrying the matter to the Federal Courts. The producers likely will endeavor to drag the matter out for as many months—or years—as possible, and then undoubtedly give in ungracefully. While the battle wages, with arguments and statements flying back and forth, many innocent bystanders, caught in the middle, will be machine-gunned, and the industry will be given another bath of unfavorable publicity in the press of the country.

Little Respect for Contracts . . .

ON PAST performances producers likely will resist the Labor Board ruling and election for the writers. Argument will be continued that the studios have a five-year agreement with the Screen Playwrights on arbitration and working conditions, and that this cannot be cancelled. The Screen Playwrights, and any other groups having agreements with the producers, should know by this time that those written understandings are only for the convenience of the producers. When the latter wish to abrogate them, they are tossed aside faster than the cutouts of a film. I recall that the studios had an agreement with the ASC, covering all classifications of cameramen. It was abruptly cancelled when the producers signed a similar contract with the IATSE, and leaders of ASC were told nothing could be done about it. Two years ago, the producers suddenly recognized the Screen Playwrights, giving the latter an agreement which included many of the main points requested at that time by the Screen Writers' Guild. But the producers failed to remember they still had a contract covering basically the same things with the writers' branch of the Academy. The Academy agreement was casually brushed aside, but after the deal with Screen Playwrights had been made.

* * *

WITH APOLOGIES TO RALPH . . .

WHEN I find time, I am going to start an agitation to bar brothers, as well as sisters, from the screen. I know both the Morgans, Frank and Ralph, know which is which, but every time I want to write about Ralph, I call him Frank. Generally I catch it before it gets into the *Spectator*. In my review of *Wives Under Suspicion* I was not alert enough; I gave Frank credit for the very fine work done by Ralph, and it got into print. Even though I kept the credit in the family I want Ralph to get all of it, as his performance was one of the best exhibitions of dramatic acting we have had in a long time. And as for the three Lane sisters—well, I'll never get them untangled.

* * *

RATHER SCREWY BUSINESS . . .

ONE of the *Spectator's* constant complaints is that producers, in their neglect to use screen players who gained big followings in silent pictures and the early talkies, are allowing a whole lot of box-office value to go to waste. One could compile a list of a

few hundred such former stars and feature players as Vera Gordon, Jack Mulhall, Monte Blue, Mitchell Lewis, David Torrence, Earl Foxe, Betty Brent, Betty Compson, Eddie Quillan, all of whom would be welcomed back by millions of picture goers. That the public remembers is demonstrated by the success the reissue of *Son of the Sheik*, Rudolph Valentino starring vehicle, is meeting wherever shown. Dave Selznick is going back a quarter of a century of stage history to secure, in Maude Adams, a star for motion pictures. No picture producer has sense enough to go back only ten years in screen history to secure stars for screen productions. Certainly a screwy business.

* * *

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

UNLESS the mocking birds stop chasing the spaniel, I soon will have on my hands a case of nervous canine prostration. . . . It will prove unwise to invest much money in a new car of the prevailing design; within a year or two, runningboards will disappear and car bodies will use the width they occupy to make more passenger room. . . . Add useful hints; if those who have flood-lights over swimming pools, tennis courts, etc., wish to get rid of the insects they attract, substitute yellowish globes for the white ones; just as much light, no insects. . . . "Don't write with your tongue in your cheek," suggests a reader; I don't keep my tongue there; I wag it. . . . One of the top-notch screen writers lets his cigar go out so often that one smoke consumes about a score of matches; we dined at his house and his wife teased him about the matches; said it kept her poor buying them; he said no one need buy matches, that millions of them were given away as advertisements; she bet him one hundred dollars he could not keep the house supplied with matches for a year without buying any; that was last October; he is wearing away, becoming a nervous wreck, but carries on; is a kleptomaniac, steals all our matches every time he drops in; bought a new kitchen range with a pilot light to replace old one which consumed matches; sidles up to Brown Derby tables and swipes the package of matches on each; asks people for a light and when given a package, keeps them talking until they forget he has it; picks up package-covers on the street in the hope of finding a match or two; by the time the year is up I think he will be quite insane. . . . A name on a Glendale sign: "W. Beato"; perhaps a distant cousin whose branch of the family suffered a typographical disaster. . . . Our front gate is a driveway-wide one, the kind you find between fields on farms. . . . On a Burbank marquee; Bank Night, Gold Is Where You Find It. . . . Melons have replaced orange juice as my breakfast starter; I do my own buying. . . . To the women who repeated to me the old one to the effect that if men gave birth to children, no more would be born, I felt impelled to remark that so far we have only the word of women that it really does hurt. . . . The garden gives promise of an extraordinary display of gladiolus; think I'll go out and see if there are any bugs on them.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

BRILLIANTLY WRITTEN SCRIPT . . .

● **THE RAGE OF PARIS**; Universal release of B. G. De Sylva production; Charles R. Rogers in charge of production; co-stars Danielle Darrieux and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.; directed by Henry Koster; original story and screen play by Bruce Manning and Felix Jackson; photographed by Joseph Valentine; art director, Jack Otterson; associate art director, Richard H. Riedel; film editor, Bernard Burton; musical direction, Charles Previn; assistant director, Frank Shaw. Cast: Mischa Auer, Louis Hayward, Helen Broderick, Charles Coleman, Samuel S. Hinds, Nella Walker, Harry Davenport.

THERE is nothing much to the story itself, yet it is a really brilliant piece of screen writing by Bruce Manning and Felix Jackson. Many times the *Spectator* has recorded its opinion that the story itself is not as important to a motion picture as the manner of its treatment. Manning and Jackson apparently did not endeavor to give us anything new in plot and situations. As a substitute they give us down-right cleverness in polishing up things we have seen before, until their glitter makes them look like new. That is the best kind of story material for light comedies. Comedies are built for the sole purpose of making us laugh, and we cannot devote ourselves wholeheartedly to laughter when we are excited about what next is going to happen to hero and heroine. Manning and Jackson give us sparkling dialogue which makes clever use of Danielle's incomplete familiarity with the English language, no doubt, though, making it appear more incomplete than it really is. The manner in which she makes us laugh with her, "Go ahead! I can took it," is ample recompense for any liberties the authors take. *The Rage of Paris* script made possible a screen demonstration of the truth of the contention that the story is less important than the treatment given it.

Koster's Direction Noteworthy . . .

OUTSTANDING direction of course, was necessary to the complete uniting of all the elements composing the production. With his *Three Smart Girls* and *100 Men and a Girl* Henry Koster demonstrated the wisdom of Joe Pasternak's action in bringing the young European director back with him when Joe himself was returning from abroad after staying there long enough to accomplish the aim he had when he left Hollywood. He was getting nowhere here, was not discovered, so he went to Europe, did things, and Hollywood discovered him there about the time he discovered Henry Koster. Thus to Joe goes the credit for giving Hollywood a young man who with his first three pictures becomes one of its most distinguished directors. His handling of *Rage of Paris* is a beautiful piece of work. The outstanding characteristic of his direction is its demonstration of Koster's appreciation of the camera's place in screen entertainment. He gives us a smooth, easy to look at, production, one not chopped up into meaningless close-ups and weird camera angles. In some scenes two characters on opposite sides of rooms are kept within the camera as the action proceeds. In

most pictures the camera swings back and forward to give us a series of close-ups of the players at the expense of the entire composition of the scene.

Danielle Is Here to Stay . . .

CAPITAL entertainment; a comedy which will please all grades of audiences and will get its place in film history as the first American-made picture of Danielle Darrieux, a young woman whose name is going to mean a great deal when it sparkles on a theatre marquee. She has everything—beauty, intelligence, personality—and could give an entire performance with her eyes alone. Between her tragic sweetheart in *Mayerling* and her bewildered French nobody in *The Rage of Paris*, there is a wide emotional sweep, and her mastery of both roles establishes her as an artist of importance. Her chief asset is her suggestion of good breeding, her air of culture and refinement which illuminates, rather than detracts from, her down-to-earthness and lack of pretense. She was fortunate in her first Hollywood venture to have with her two such agreeable and talented young men as Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and Louis Hayward. As I mentioned recently, I have known Doug ever since I helped him on his pony, always have liked him and now admire him greatly as a rising actor; and my liking for Hayward's personality and respect for his ability mounts as I view each of his performances.

Settings Have Story Value . . .

THE picture was cast intelligently, giving evidence of full consideration of the interrelations of the various characters. Collectively the players are an agreeable group, each of the mthe sort of person we would expect to find mingling with the others. This makes for an even and convincing collection of performances. Helen Broderick, Mischa Auer and Charles Coleman give able support to the leads, and in one of the smaller parts Harry Davenport contributes an arresting characterization. The production also fits neatly into the whole pattern. With each picture Jack Otterson's intelligence as an art director becomes more apparent, his inspiration always obviously being the script. He preserves the unity of characters and the settings in which they are presented, the problem he and his associate, Richard Riedel, having to face here being that of supporting the mood of the story from the dreary environment in which we find the little French girl, stranded in a strange world, to the fulfillment of her dreams in surroundings of elegance and charm. That Fairbanks is a man of wealth and refinement is registered when we get the first glimpse of his home, and each of the other settings as consistently does its share of story telling.

Senses Camera Values . . .

THE Otterson sets and the artistic photography of Joe Valentine are story elements. Koster appreciates this, appreciates that the screen is primarily visual, pictorial entertainment, composes his scenes with an eye for their pictorial and story values, and keeps them intact instead of giving them to us in a

series of detached pieces. Equally discerning is he in the development of human values. His people are just that—people, not actors. His sense of humor is apparent throughout the picture—keeps darting in and out in a succession of brilliant flashes until the whole picture becomes a continuous joy, good to look at and good to listen to. Producer Buddy De Sylva certainly is entitled to take a big bow. He has given the screen one of its outstanding comedies of this or any other season.

ONE YOU WILL ENJOY . . .

● **COWBOY FROM BROOKLYN;** Warner Bros.; executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Lou Edelman; director, Lloyd Bacon; screen play, Earl Baldwin; from play, "Howdy Stranger," by Robert Sloan and Louis Pelletier, Jr.; photography, Arthur Edeson; music and lyrics, Richard Whiting and Johnny Mercer; orchestral arrangements, Adolph Deutsch; art director, Esdras Hartley; musical direction, Leo F. Forbstein; film editor, James Gibbon; assistant director, Dick Mayberry; song, "Cowboy from Brooklyn," by Harry Warren and Johnny Mercer. Cast: Pat O'Brien, Dick Powell, Priscilla Lane, Dick Foran, Ann Sheridan, Johnnie Davis, Ronald Reagan, Emma Dunn, Granville Bates, James Stephenson, Hobart Cavanaugh, Elizabeth Risdon, Dennie Moore, Rosella Towne, May Boley, Harry Barris, Candy Candido, Donald Briggs, Jeffrey Lynn, John Ridgely, William Davidson, Mary Field.

ONE hour-and-a-quarter of good fun, plus excellent singing by Dick Powell, the engaging presence of the clever and charming Priscilla Lane, and capable performances by a strong cast, among other distinguished members of which are Pat O'Brien and Dick Foran. Some time ago the *Spectator*, in a plea for more outdoor pictures, suggested dude ranches as locales to give a western flavor to even sophisticated dramas. *Cowboy from Brooklyn* is not a sophisticated drama; it is a rather wild farce-comedy, but it starts at a dude ranch and takes its western flavor with it when it hops to New York, where it ends with a rodeo scene in Madison Square Garden. Earl Baldwin's screen play is a clever parade of laugh provoking scenes neatly tied together to provide rapid action. A big feature is Dick Powell's singing. He has a half-dozen songs, five by Richard Whiting and Johnny Mercer, one by Harry Warren and Mercer, and never was in better voice. The songs themselves appealed to me as having both musical and lyrical worth, and Dick ably brings out all their values. Soundmen Dolph Thomas and David Forrest deserve credit for outstanding recording of the song numbers.

Pat, Priscilla and the Rest . . .

LLOYD BACON directed to produce laughs, and produces plenty. Hilarious scenes follow one another in quick succession. Pat O'Brien is a joy as the fastest talking theatrical agent the screen has given us. He has most to do with the motivation of the story and certainly keeps it humming along. Priscilla Lane has a charming personality and such a nice singing voice that we could have stood more of it than we got. Dick Foran is the villain of the piece, a rather bumptious, bucolic one who makes a big

contribution to the entertaining results achieved. Emma Dunn, excellent actress always and one we should see oftener, shares with Granville Bates the parentage of Priscilla and Johnnie Davis; and as the parents of Dick Powell, Elizabeth Risdon and Hobart Cavanaugh are excellent. Thanks to Bacon's direction, all the small parts and bits are fully up to the standard set by the leading players. The romance between Priscilla and Powell is developed smoothly and adds a pleasing note. Lou Edelman, producer, can take a bow for a job well done. The picture is mounted on an elaborate scale, Esdras Hartley, art director, providing sets which range from a dude ranch to the interior of Madison Square Garden, and which gave Arthur Edeson opportunities for more of the fine photography we have learned to expect from him. James Gibbon's film editing gives smooth progression to the parade of entertaining scenes.

SHOWS LIFE AS IT IS . . .

● **HAVING WONDERFUL TIME;** RKO picture and release; Pandro S. Berman in charge of production; directed by Alfred Santell; screen play by Arthur Kober; adapted from his New York stage success as produced by Marc Connelly; photographed by Robert de Grasse, with special effects by Vernon L. Walker; art direction by Van Nest Polglase and Perry Ferguson; set dressing by Darrell Silvera; gowns by Edward Stevenson and Renie; musical director, Roy Webb; recorded by John E. Tribby; edited by William Hamilton; assistant director, James Anderson; songs, "My First Impression of You" and "Nighty Night," music by Sam Stept, lyrics by Charles Tobias. Cast: Ginger Rogers, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Peggy Conklin, Lucille Ball, Lee Bowman, Eve Arden, Dorothea Kent, Richard (Red) Skelton, Donald Meek, Jack Carson, Clarence H. Wilson, Allan Lane, Grady Sutton, Shimen Ruskin, Dorothy Tree, Leona Roberts, Harlan Briggs, Inez Courtney, Juanita Quigley.

QUITE a picture. Honest, down-to-earth, without frills. It does not run true to the form which is responsible for the present alarming box-office depression. With shocking disregard for the most sacred traditions, *Having Wonderful Time* does not end with our discovery that the poor boy who loves the poor girl is really a millionaire who was so bored with luxury that he disguised himself by rearranging his necktie and took a job as a waiter in the summer camp where he meets the poor girl. Arthur Kober forgot to write the conventional ending of a screen play. It is something that the Screen Writers' Guild should do something about. When we last see the nice girl and the nice boy they are poor in all material things, but rich in the joint ownership of a great love we feel even life together in a one-room home in no way will weaken. We do not fear for their future; we feel the boy has the right stuff in him, so, after all, the ending is a happy one.

Will Lift Some Eyebrows . . .

THE story is a trifle more daring than we have become accustomed to since the Production Code became the dictator of screen morals. The camp in which most of the action takes place, is the summer recreational gathering place of young people who must watch their pennies. A few of the young men offer to lend their cooperation to such of the young

women as might be willing to extend the holiday spirit to their moral scruples. It is done nicely, of course, but I am afraid it will cause the stricter purists to raise their eyebrows in shocked surprise. However, without it the story would have little point, and those honest enough to accept it as depicting life as it is, will find the whole picture a satisfactory and unoffending piece of screen entertainment. Al Santell has given it understanding and convincing direction, proving himself equally adept in the handling of both romantic and comedy scenes. He was fortunate in having two such responsive leads as Ginger Rogers and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. Their performances are quiet, restrained, free from histrionic extravagances, but rich in human values. I do not think either of these gifted players has given us previously a finer, more deeply understanding example of screen acting. Only a day or two before the RKO picture was previewed, I saw Doug as the wealthy, sophisticated young man in *The Rage of Paris*. In *Wonderful Time* he is a poor boy, a run-of-the-mill young American, a strongly contrasting part, but in each he is completely the person he plays. Peggy Conklin, Lucille Ball, Lee Bowman and several others give a good account of themselves. RKO has mounted the picture handsomely, and Robert de Grasse's photography maintains a highly artistic standard.

HAS MEAT, BUT BITTER SAUCE . . .

● **KEEP SMILING;** 20th Century-Fox; associate producer, John Stone; director, Herbert I. Leeds; screen play, Frances Hyland and Albert Ray; original idea, Frank Fenton and Lynn Root; photographer, Edward Cronjager; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Abert Hogsett; film editor, Harry Reynolds; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Jane Withers, Gloria Stuart, Henry Wilcoxon, Helen Westley, Jed Prouty, Douglas Fowley, Robert Allen, Pedro de Cordoba, Claudia Coleman, Paula Rae Wright, Etta McDaniel, Carmencita Johnson, Mary McCarthy, Hal K. Dawson, the Three Nelsons.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

A GOOD deal more meat is to be found on Jane Withers' new one, *Keep Smiling*, than has surrounded the bantamweight carcasses of most of her previous films. Not that all the said meat is savory, some of it being dished up with a sauce that tastes of gall. The yarn is about Hollywood, about little Jane's efforts to redeem her uncle, to see whom she has run away from school, being an orphan and lonely, only to find that the once famous and wealthy motion picture director is on the toboggan, due to drink, his property being auctioned, and he unable to get a job. Much of the action centers about a the-

atrical boarding house and there is a vivid array of types, the silly mother and her spoiled brat who "werks in pikchas," the courageous old actor who keeps up the fight, even though he must do without his meals. And I am yet in doubt as to whether his sudden death was caused from heart failure upon hearing he was to be placed under contract or from starvation.

And It Is Mostly Dark Meat . . .

YOU see, not all aspects of the story make a pretty picture, any more than all aspects of the real Hollywood are pleasant to contemplate. As far as the exposé is concerned, I applaud it. One of the most interesting and significant movements in the film capital is its tendency to turn in upon itself and view its own processes, which has been manifested in numerous recent films. I have not seen in many months a picture dealing with Hollywood which did not have something trenchant to say about it. But in this case, I wonder if some of these exposing episodes are not too dark in hue for the generally humorous tone of the picture. Frankly, some of these portions left an unpleasant taste in my mouth. I grant, however, that my reaction may be due largely to first-hand associations, and that persons not associated with the motion picture business may view these episodes in a somewhat different light. Parents and teachers within my reading range, then, will take into account that I may be overemphasizing this grimmer aspect of the picture; probably their offspring or charges will suffer no grave disillusionment or embitterment if they witness the goings on.

Jane Scores Again . . .

CERTAINLY to offset the darker portions, there is plenty of good old hoke in the ably written screen play of Frances Hyland and Albert Ray. Jane Withers has ample opportunity to display her bag of tricks, and a bounteous bagful she has these days. A wide variety of impersonations she exhibits, all witty and performed with capital showmanship, especially one of Joan Davis. The comedy moments of her role are played with her usual ginger, and in the heavier ones she registers considerable pathos. Director Herbert I. Leeds deserves credit for his spontaneous direction of Jane, as well as for his imaginative handling of the other characters. He has done an A1 job on his assignment, making it one of the best of the Withers pictures. Though the action is usually rapid, the tempo at which the story unfolds is not in the least hurried, there seeming to be time to make digressions for all manner of commentary and gags. Perhaps the exhibitions of the Three Nelsons, jugglers, could be cut just a bit, together with another digression or two, though, as a whole, this bubbling volubility of style probably constitutes a good deal of the appeal of the picture.

Actor Is Excellent . . .

HENRY WILCOXON is altogether swell as the child's uncle. Over a wide emotional range, he plays without a false note or gesture. He makes gen-

Eyes Examined and Glasses Fitted

DEVER D. GRAY, OPT. D.

OPTOMETRIST

1725 North Highland Avenue

Hollywood, California

HEmpstead 8438

uine a part which, in less capable hands, might have been mawkish. Gloria Stuart is at her best too, acting her part with fine sympathy and understanding. A large cast of players, children and adults, give admirably individual characterizations, notably Pedro De Cordoba, Douglas Fowley, Mary McCarthy and Robert Allen. Young Paula Rae Wright is delightful as the upstage child actress, despite the unsympathetic nature of the part. Incidentally, if a good laugh is expected when she upsets the breakfast table on herself, the scene should be recorded again or shortened. Her wails are entirely too pathetic, and, anyway, an audience is not prone to laugh at a child with hot oat meal in her eyes. Helen Westley and Jed Prouty troupe efficiently in smaller parts, and ones with less definite character traits. The whole is ably photographed by Edward Cronjager, and sets of Bernard Herzbrun and Albert Hogsett are eminently suitable. It is interesting to recall, however, the number of shots which were out of doors or in some natural location, as on a studio sound stage, showing again that entertainment is not dependent upon elaborate production values.

WASHINGTON STEPS IN . . .

● **BORDER G-MEN**; RKO picture and release; produced by Bert Gilroy; directed by David Howard; screen play by Oliver Drake, based on a story by Bernard McConville; photography by Joseph H. August; art direction by Van Nest Polglase and Lucius Croxton; musical director, Roy Webb; sound recording, Richard Van Hossen; edited by Frederic Knudtson. Cast: George O'Brien, Laraine Johnson, Ray Whitley, John Miljan, Rita LaRoy, Edgar Dearing, William Stelling, Edward Keane, Ethan Laidlaw, Hugh Sothorn, Bobby Burns.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

INTERNATIONAL complications are at stake in *Border G-Men*, for Culprit John Miljan is bent on smuggling firearms, a trained army of ex-convicts, and a large herd of horses onto a ship bound for South America, where the cargo is needed to abet a political cause. G-Man George O'Brien has been sent from Washington to investigate a rumor of the enterprise and to prevent any such occurrence, since it would be in violation of our Neutrality Law. An inventive story idea is this, and its incorporation into the present Western film does much to freshen up the essentially formula material upon which the picture, like most of its kind, is based. An especially agreeable phase of the variation is the absense of a villain in the deep-dyed sense; the hero is merely matching his wits against the intrigue of some crafty but urbane persons. Not that either the characters or the story are subtle. Plenty of ridin' and shootin' goes on ere the final clinch. But the yarn is not stereotyped and it holds the interest.

Picture Has Color . . .

ANOTHER virtue of the piece is that it takes the time and pains to give us some side glances of the dear old West and its people. There are some wholesome and fresh-airy shots of the hills and of the sea and of cowboys singing and playing in the night, which will better the film's chances of appealing to the more discriminating spectator. I especially liked

the sound of the crickets in the silence of the night—well recorded. Cameraman Joseph August has done an unusual job of photography for this type of picture, some of his shots being imaginatively lighted and well composed. With respect to color, *Border G-Man* is a considerable improvement over the O'Brien opus I reviewed last month, and augurs well for the merit of the one I shall probably review next month. David Howard, director, put good suspense into his situations, a brisk tempo into the story. The very contained George O'Brien still manages to keep just this side of swagger. He is an essentially agreeable fellow, but I do wish scriptists would let him stub his toe sometime, or do someone an injustice. And why did he go to the party dressed as a cowboy when everyone else was dressed in civilized fashion? John Miljan is as smooth an intriguer as one could wish for, and Rita LaRoy "turns on the heat" efficiently as his vampish co-plotter. Laraine Johnson and William Stelling give competent performances. The story was written by Bernard McConville, screen-played by Oliver Drake, this economy of writers doubtless contributing to its good movement.

* * *

MERELY A SUGGESTION . . .

WHEN we survey the present box-office situation and consider the sameness of the pictures Hollywood is producing, the conviction grows within us that the film industry would be wise if it would give some thought to producing producers.

★ ★ ★

JOHNNY MERCER

Lyrics

"COWBOY FROM BROOKLYN"

Warner Brothers

★ ★ ★

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

Award Extraordinary . . .

ON BEHALF of the (not yet formed) Society for the Prevention of Deafness Among Professional Picture Preview Observers, I award the Grand Cross of the Order of the Unimpaired Eardrum to the sound machine operator on duty the evening of June 6 in Projection Room One of the Twentieth Century-Fox Studio. Having lamented loudly and long two weeks ago in this column about assault and battery of the ear in that selfsame projection room, I make haste to give thanks to whom-ever-it-may-be for a wholly satisfying management of the sound machine on the occasion of my last visit. Perhaps I flatter myself, thinking that anyone had read my plea for pity and possibly acted upon it. Perchance there is at least one operator on the studio-staff who is acoustically sensitive. Whatever the reason, the result was beautiful, not only musically, but the spoken dialogue sounded natural, agreeable, fascinatingly varied in dramatic innuendos, as spoken dialogue should be. The speaking voice, too, is a musical instrument, just as printed poetry is song. I am not sure whether the Academy has a piece of statuary for the never-seen-but-always-heard sound operator. In any case, will my anonymous benefactor of June 6 kindly accept the reward in the spirit I have proposed it? I salute him without a headache!

Growls, Fanfares, etc. . . .

OF COURSE everyone knows the lion who gives a genteel roar before an MGM picture unwinds itself on the screen. A friend of mine insists that the lion sounds dyspeptic, that he hiccups, belches, rather than roars. He surmises that so many recordings were taken of the lion that he was gastrically nervous by the time it came to a "take." Personally, I would not miss MGM's king of beasts and his lionessque "Pshaw" for anything. To me the little preamble is delightfully arrogant. I like less well the strident fanfares which now precede the individual title music in every Twentieth Century-Fox film. Most times they sound to me as a wrong start, being short and in no sense a preparation for what one hears a moment later. I fancy that other people are equally bored with hearing the same commonplace raucous march tune which starts Movietone newsreels week after week. News marches on, but this old platter of sound clatters on the same tune. What a good thing other studios do not follow suit. Mr. Disney might immortalize Donald the Duck or Mickey or the Three Little Pigs. Fortunately, he cares too much for the individuality of the respective pictures. RKO crackles inoffensively and one hopes it is not a sign of static. Columbia lights the lamp of liberty, this being at least the implication, but at least it is done without an audible trademark. Politeness forbids me to suggest something to Paramount, but I dislike making a "lapp"-ingstock out of good friends,

which Lord Terry of the publicity office would not enjoy. Incidentally, some of the best title music comes from Warners.

"Suited You?", Indeed . . .

THE admirable Peter Lorre, playing the name role in *The Mysterious Mr. Moto*, is disguised as a valet and asks his master's approval repeatedly in the most disarming tone: "Suited You?" It is a surprising succession of the unexpected Twentieth Century-Fox puts up in this film during which a man is to be murdered because he will not sell out a steel formula to an armament concern. One would hardly expect to find much musical satisfaction in such a picture. And yet, I would cite it as an example of a wholly realistic screen play, definitely enhanced by excellently chosen musical byplay. Musical Director Samuel Kaylin is much to be complimented and I think Producer Sol Wurtzel and Director Norman Foster appreciate this. The ballad-like title, the barrel-organ man in the London street scene at once make for convincing atmosphere. There is a street fiddler who still plays away very late in the evening, and a fascinating tune it is. No, dear reader, there was no orchestra sounding from somewhere in the void beyond the screen by way of an accompaniment. Nor was there one for the ballad singer and accordeonist in the tavern. Big Ben tolls without embellishments, and in the picture gallery scene one hears as good chamber music as you would in the best salon. Again no orchestra. I think the examples are sufficient to demonstrate Kaylin's good dramatic sense. If Music Director Kaylin were to ask with Mr. Moto: "Suited You?", I would have to answer: "Complimenting you most completely upon ideal music realism."

Blocking the Blockade . . .

WALTER WANGER paid Composer Janssen another compliment when he arranged with NBC to broadcast half an hour of the music written for his film, *Blockade*. As I mentioned in last week's review, the producer made handsome acknowledgment of the value of the music in the preface to the preview program. It was an odd experience to hear the essential portions of the score in continuous concert form, only a visual memory linking it with certain events on the screen. As a result I would say that some portions of the composition I admired more from a musical (technical) standpoint, while as a picture I still feel that some of it is too impressionistic to be convincing atmospherically. I am thinking in that connection at once of the opening, rather modern sounding clarinet-flute theme which, with subsequent development in the orchestra, makes me think too much of Debussy's *Afternoon of a Faun* rather than of a pastoral Spain of today. Later on Janssen, so it seemed to me, had recourse to his own and successful tone-poem *New Year's Eve in New York*

when he "composed" the madly gay and frantic whirl of the war-ridden city. This American musician altogether accomplished some quite notable music writing and it is no less notable and progressive of Walter Wanger to approve and to like it. That happens not often in Hollywood. Janssen, by the way, employs a remarkable technic of orchestration, obtaining tellingly sonorous, versatile effects from a small aggregation of players. Which must have pleased much the keeper of the Wanger purse.

Telling But Not Loud . . .

IT WOULD be asking too much that composers for the screen, and music department heads, should continuously live in that mood of musical ecstasy and rare inventiveness from which come the *magnum cum laude* scores. It is already a mark of quality when a musical film accompaniment is heard but not "noticed." Nor is it necessarily to be held against a composer when his music leaves a lasting impression almost apart from the film it elucidates or illuminates. The song writers' business would be poor if that were the case. At times I wonder, however, whether songs are written for the film, or whether the film is just an excuse for the XWZ Publishing Company and their tunesmith to sell wagon loads of ballads with the aid of radio and dance bands. A very good score, because atmospheric and human-dramatically fitting, is that of Max Steiner for MGM's *White Banners*. Steiner always studies the film characters and situations with a degree of sympathy that prompts him to heighten merriment and emotions. He has a flair for turning on—or for dimming—lights and colors in terms of harmonies and orchestrations, more subtle and more telling than those coming from an electric switchboard. I am thinking, to give but one instance, of the tonal effect when the coils in this film story of the invention of the refrigerator turn white with ice.

Art of Suggestion . . .

STEINER does not exceed the function of music in relation to the film. He practices the art of suggestion. His music seems to solidify before our eyes, I might almost say. It takes on whiteness, and a brilliance which expresses the elation and heart-thrill of the inventors who see their dream come true. The music not only illustrates the physical process of refrigeration shown on the screen; it conveys to the picture patron still more of the deep and radiant feeling welling up in the heart of the physicist rewarded at long last. It reveals more of that feeling of victory over failure and lack of money than the relatively quiet dialogue on the screen conveys. After all, people contemplate the marvel of an electric ice box hardly more than the advantage of hot water in their upstairs bathroom. Such conveniences are taken for

granted unless they break down mechanically. Yet there is romance, remorse and much other reading of character in the story of *White Banners*. Dialogue is deftly and beautifully modulated in regard to spoken voices. Real drama here is spoken softly, to which Steiner has added frequently the legitimate innuendo of musical suggestion.

Swell, Yet Not Swollen . . .

THERE occurs a rather fetching song in the course of the Century comedy, *Three Blind Mice*. It rolls along merrily on the well-gear'd contraption, modeled in current taste by Composer Lew Pollock and Lyricist Sidney D. Mitchel. It is a very nice bit of entertainment, scored with gusto but not what I might be allowed to call "glorymania." In other words, if a tune is not lithe and alive of sentiment, all the glorifying by the swingiest band will not give it the inner swing which a good song must have, and must have in common with the lyrics. This tune has it, and Musical Director Arthur Lange has saved it from being drowned in a sea of saxophonian mellowness. Many a good tune has been sucked up by the quicksands of super-orchestration and "was seen no more." Lange introduces also engaging bits of Spanish music in this frothy little story. I wish he had used the well known *Three Blind Mice* tune a little more. It lends itself well to clever and amusing juggling. The dance music episodes are managed charmingly. The whole score echoes the quietly elegant, suave atmosphere of the fashionable Biltmore Hotel in Santa Barbara. Students of classic music will come away empty-eared, but style in film music is not a hard and fast quality. That is why the Arthur Lange score meets all the requirements so well. It is swell, but not swollen.

Raging Very Softly . . .

CHARLES PREVIN made much of his opportunities in Universal's glorification la belle Danielle Darrieux. That is to say, his opportunities were light and he did not stress them. At times, the music might have been more impish, something for which Previn has a taste as demonstrated in Durbin's last picture. However, the impishness perhaps purposely has been reserved for the dialogue. So the music has been held down. There is much of it, merely background for the most part, except during one well played and amusingly steered Mozart excerpt, when a couple of young society heroes out-talk the indignant shushing of the more music-minded around them. Among the best features of the Previn score is his aptitude in leading from one scene into another. Film composers find this one of the chief difficulties quite often. Of course, *The Rage of Paris* does not rage violently or in many extremes as far as the play is concerned. A little more rage could be turned into musical fun de luxe and Previn would have relished it, no doubt. But, it is futile to rage over what might have been done to music come into its own. There is an apt selection of title tunes which reminds one that, practiced theatreman which he is, Previn knows the value of an overture also for the cinema.

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CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by
RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD
of
MABEL KEEFER

WHILE viewing that delightful picture *Mad About Music*, and listening to *I Love to Whistle*, I found myself wishing that I were hearing that infectious song for the first time. The reasoning back of the idea of broadcasting songs in current pictures, weeks—in some cases months—before theatre patrons will see the picture, is beyond my comprehension. True, *I Love to Whistle* is a type of song that will sell under any conditions, that is, it should, because it is the kind of music we need, but will it sell as many copies when we can learn the words and music by listening to the radio, as it would if producers were to make it a rule not to allow their songs on the air for at least six months after the release date of a picture? Using *I Love to Whistle* as an example: If we could have heard it in all its pristine freshness when we saw the accompanying action on the screen, wouldn't it have added still more charm to the picture? And if we knew we could not hear the song for some time after unless we bought a copy of it, what then? I rather think we would buy it.

* * *

DR. USSHER has expressed disapproval of the orchestral background for the song *Chapel Bells* in *Mad About Music*. I have a desire to go back and make them do the song over, with piano accompaniment only. Several times, when the orchestra made a crescendo, I felt an answering crescendo of irritation.

* * *

STILL talking of *Mad About Music* (I have an idea I am rather mad about the picture): The harmonica ensemble with its rhythmic liveliness in which there was no raucous blaring, added to my enjoyment; also, hearing Herbert Marshall's very pleasing speaking voice again, and seeing him in such a likable part. I have not mentioned Deanna, but, after all, wouldn't it be superfluous? Everything has been said. Jackie Moran—confidentially, I find myself torn asunder by my infatuation for both Jackie Moran and Mickey Rooney. But three cheers for everyone in the cast and everyone connected with the making of the picture.

* * *

A SHORT distance from our office building, two elms have grown up with the trunks so close together that they have the appearance of being one magnificent tree.

* * *

QUOTE—We believe that the public now wants good old-fashioned motion pictures . . . something they can go to, relax and imagine they are doing what the star is doing. Unquote. If one were to guess who said that, one would say Welford Beaton, Editor of the *Hollywood Spectator*, wouldn't one? But one

would be wrong—quite wrong. An executive of one of the large producing companies of the film industry is quoted as having made that statement.

* * *

A MAN said to me recently: "I like the movies—there really is nothing I like better than to see a good picture—but I've been fooled so many times with ballyhoo that I've sort of got out of the habit of going."

* * *

THERE once was a king who had everything—gold, jewels and land—yet he said, "I long to be merry and bright as a cherry, but my heart it is heavy as lead." Now what do you think of that? Oh, what do you think of that? There was also a man—if believe it you can—who was happy as he could be, yet he had no gold, in fact we are told, not even a shirt had he. Now what do you think of that? Oh, what do you think of that?

* * *

SOMEONE has said that illusion and wisdom combined are the charm of life and art. And what better medium to bring it to us than screen art?

* * *

CLARENCE BUDDINGTON KELLAND tells *The Saturday Evening Post* that tourists arriving in Phoenix now refer to the Southern Arizona transcontinental highway as *The Fugitive Father Trail* because of his story *Fugitive Father*. Some time ago I said that the story was, without question, a screen story and I should be quite upset if I did not soon hear that it had gone into production. I have heard nothing but I still have an ear cocked.

* * *

WONDER if Mr. Beaton calls Throgmorton—that pet weed of his—Throg, for short, or is it Mortie? But maybe it is not the kind of weed that one calls by a nickname.

* * *

THE British Public is said to have laughed at the pictures the brilliant American artist, James McNeill Whistler painted of the Thames, and then looked again that they might laugh some more, until in the process of looking they actually began to see the river as he held it up to them. Which fact supports my contention that if a pattern is held up before us continually, we are sure, eventually, to conform to it to a certain degree. Therefore, it is of vital importance that the things we see on the screen be such that we are helped, not hindered, in our everyday living.

* * *

EXHIBITORS should see that all sound-film operators learn these words of Wordsworth: "Soft is the music that would charm forever."

* * *

AFTER reading Editor Beaton's review of *Holiday*, I am all agog to see it. And his description of the character portrayed by Cary Grant—"Superficially a rather irresponsible fellow, one who takes life in easy strides, he never fails to keep his ideals in our minds.

to let us get the serious side of him even when he does something to make us laugh"—tells the secret of all successful comedy. Unless we feel that there is something substantial underneath, it rings hollow—sounds brassy.

* * *

OLD men look so comfortable when they are smoking a pipe, and I see no reason why old ladies should not have the same privilege. When I become an old lady I fully intend to smoke a pipe. I shall puff meditatively and look noncommittal.

* * *

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE calls attention to Isabel Paterson's "Turns With a Bookworm," in the "Books" section. Every Monday morning I. M. P. helps me to start the week right. While breakfasting, I read as many of her "turns" as a limited amount of time permits, and thus manage to acquire at least a modicum of good humor to start the day. This week she told of how she awakened her two guests on a cool, cloudy morning to tell them that it looked like rain, and they needn't go on a trip that had been planned if they would rather sleep. The guests voted for sleep and the Imp said, very well, but it would do them good to come out, and there was a lot of lovely scenery on the way, and nice fresh air, and while she did not want to insist, she felt that they were making a mistake. "Still, you can do just as you please, if you are as selfish as all that. . . . Thus given a free choice, like a farmer with the A. A. A., they moaned and dragged themselves upright. . . ." After reading that I went to work grinning broadly. . . . On Tuesday morning there is the *Spectator* to start me on my way—well, not exactly rejoicing, but much more good-natured than I would be without it. (Sometimes it doesn't arrive until Tuesday, and then it's just too bad.) By Wednesday morning the week is pretty well under way, and I am not quite so much in need of help.

* * *

JUST read a book review wherein the reviewer says, ". . . but we also find what a difference art, discernment and imagination can make to a story." Yes, indeed! And to a motion picture.

* * *

THE happening that most of all makes me feel like a dumb-bunny, is to be taken seriously when I'm trying to be funny.

* * *

DR. USSHER'S account of his visit to the "unicorns" seems to promise that there are good times ahead in the matter of sound recording and sound production. (*Spectator*, May 28.)

* * *

AS TIME goes by on the run, it seems birthdays aren't much fun; but pause and reflect before you object—supposing you'd never had one.

* * *

THERE is something about King George that appeals to me. I like him. And, judging from the way Queen Elizabeth was looking at him in a grave picture I saw recently, she likes him too.

CAMERA ANGLES

By Robert Joseph

BLOCKADE BLOCKADED? . . .

PERSONALLY I would give my right arm to believe the latest releases emanate from the Wanger offices anent Spanish Rebel spies in Hollywood and Mr. Wanger's decision to fight hell and high water to preserve democracy as far east as Bakersfield. But I am not convinced. I just cannot see General Franco sparing any of his Italian or German auxiliaries, not to mention British financial advisors, for a little Hollywood espionage. Not as long as Jimmie Fidler is on the job. Mr. Wanger would have us believe that his sense of democracy has been wounded because extra-national pressure has been brought to bear on *Blockade*, a picture on the Spanish Civil War which takes no sides, solves no issues, points no morals. Yes, sir, I would even throw in my left arm, if needs be, to believe it. But I cannot, for various reasons.

Tips His Hand . . .

WALTER WANGER tipped his hand recently in the *New York Times*. Citing the countries which form the market for his, and therefore all, UA product, he wrote, "In my pictures I must make certain that every gesture and word can be understood and appreciated . . . by audiences in Canada, England, Ireland, India, South Africa, Australia and (with superimposed titles), in thirty-three Spanish speaking countries, in Java, Haiti, Iceland, Liberia, Egypt, Manchukuo, Madagascar and Nova Zembla." He adds France in a later passage. It is interesting and important to note that he cites none of the "axis" countries, Italy, Germany or any of their Balkan and South European and Baltic satellites. This struggle between the totalitarian philosophy and the democratic tradition is a pretty desperate business in Europe these days. It seems a little brash, to say the least, to use it all as an occasion to push a little picture publicity. Walter Wanger said some pretty strong things, in the general direction of the state office. But it should not be tough to conjecture what the State Department said in response. Its answer must have sounded strangely akin to a Bronx cheer, embellished with a curt "Oh, yeah!"

* * *

RECOMMENDED READING . . .

THERE are few books on motion pictures that deal with the subject in an understandable and yet adult manner. Some texts get deep into the aesthetic-sociological implications so that readers drop the book at the third page. Others purport to give the inside story of personal lives, and thereby become cardboard covered fan magazines. Gilbert Seldes' newest book, *Films Come from America*, attempts to steer an intelligent middle course. There is much in the current volume that is good, solid critical material. There is an unfortunate amount of facile rea-

soning and sweeping generalization that will irk the reader who takes his film seriously. Seldes' basic theories anent the function of motion pictures are similar to Editor Beaton's. His stand that excessive dialogue has lost for the film much of its original appeal is something that the editor has been saying since the advent of sound.

Two Important Points . . .

GILBERT SELDES makes two important statements. The first of these is that the ticket buyer goes into the film theatre to see a *motion picture of motion*. He does not go to hear anyone sing. He does not go to hear garbage cans rattle. He does not go to hear dialogue flipping back and forth. The first kinetoscopes and vitascopes captured public imagination because they showed action; not because they exploited the personalities of the actors of those days. Leland Stanford commissioned Muybridge to photograph his horse in action because he wanted to see the steed move. That same desire for motion has persisted to this day. Seldes remarks that if producers would take cognizance of this elemental and all-pervading principal, and guide their productions accordingly the public would be more inclined to patronize theatres more generously.

Who Owns the Movies? . . .

SELDES' other statement is a little breath-taking in its implication. He opines that since motion picture audiences the world over have literally poured billions of dollars into the laps of picture makers, producers owe them an obligation. This obligation is to give them the kind of pictures they want and are best for the people. Seldes pooh-poohs the current red herring of "propaganda films" and observes, as did Editor Beaton in a recent issue, that every picture that emanates from Hollywood is a salesman for something, for a certain code of morals, for a certain kind of conduct, for American standards of living. The implication in Seldes' statement of obligation is that producers are not playing fair when they knowingly grind out an inferior product. And in answer to the reply that no producer willingly makes an inferior picture, Seldes pointedly says "Oh, yeah" in his finely polished style. Whatever the reaction to these and other provocative arguments raised by the author, *Films Come from America* deserves a reading. Sandwiched in with some uncommon good sense is a lot of balderdash for those who want a little relaxa-

tion every few pages. Picture makers, above all, should thumb through the leaves of this tome.

* * *

CHEAPER COLOR PROCESS...

RECENTLY I had the pleasure of witnessing several shorts which displayed Brewster Color, a new and cheaper screen color process. The inventor, Mr. Brewster himself, was kind enough to go to some length to explain the intricacies of the new process, and I must confess that all of it was quite beyond me. My ears perked up, however, when he said that the negative cost was some five times cheaper than that of other color films now on the market. That is important. Color, like sound when it first came in, is still somewhat of a cinematic luxury.

Directors Speak...

AT A luncheon after the screening two directors present, Herbert Biberman and Frank Tuttle, both expressed the opinion that there were not enough good color men in Hollywood to count on the fingers of one hand. Director Biberman pointed out, in reviewing the short subjects just witnessed, that the cameraman and the gaffer who worked on the pictures had not the slightest idea of correct lighting or color composition. Not that they were to blame, for there are few technicians in Hollywood who have yet caught the trick of making effective use of color without blinding the eye.

Cart Before the Horse...

THUS far there has been no single picture which has attempted to use color throughout without going after striking effects. *Becky Sharp* will be sadly remembered for what it did to the eyes. The most successful venture in color thus far has been Goldwyn's *Follies*; yet even there the subdued pastels had a somewhat manufactured air about them. Hollywood technicians are still playing with color, because there is still the erroneous impression that color values must be independent of cinematic values. It might be well to remember that one of the greatest sound pictures ever filmed was *In Old Arizona*, one of the first. Some directors, Fritz Lang, for example, use sound most effectively by forgetting about it. It seems that the same story holds true in the case of colors. When there is a color specialist who knows how to get the camera to ignore color, only then will that newest of film headaches be cured.

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A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—June 25, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 11

Box-Office Slump Due to Nature, Not
Quality, of Current Pictures

Robert Joseph on Cross-Country Trip
Interviews Various Exhibitors

Mabel Keefer Expresses Herself on Some
Motion Picture Matters

Bruno Ussher Contributes Comments on
Music in Current Films

... REVIEWS ...

LORD JEFF ★ MY BILL ★ WOMAN AGAINST MAN ★ WHEN WERE YOU BORN?
ROMANCE OF THE LIMBERLOST ★ REFORMATORY ★ CITY STREETS ★ THE WAVE

... USSHER'S MUSIC REVIEWS ...

Having a Wonderful Time ★ Woman Against Woman ★ My Bill

ONLY PUBLICATION IN THE WORLD DEVOTED
EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM



From the EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

OFF ON THE OPEN ROAD . . .

FROM Here to Elsewhere. Where Elsewhere is I do not know, but the car is provided with what it takes; full cargoes of gas, oil and water have been stowed aboard, there is air in the tires, the trip speedometer has been set at 000.0, and out somewhere at the end of the road which leads to it is the Elsewhere we ultimately will come to. It may be among the Redwoods, by the side of an Oregon stream or a Washington lake, but it will be far enough from here to enable me to look back at Hollywood and readjust my mind to it, to straighten the kinks out of my perspective and bring a fresh mind to my consideration of its manner of doing things. . . . What I am trying to say, and had better say before I become more submerged in the exuberance of my own verbosity, is that I am taking time out and won't have anything in the next *Spectator*. Taking time out each summer is a habit Mrs. *Spectator* and I started just thirty years ago, and we have a lot of fun together.

* * *

THEATRE CLOSING THREATENED . . .

UNDER Cleveland, Ohio, date line of June 10, the Associated Press sent out this news to the many millions of readers of the papers it serves: "Operators of 80 neighborhood movie houses here threatened today to close their theatres several days each week as a protest against what they termed 'weak pictures.' The Cleveland Motion Picture Exhibitors' Association instructed Secretary George W. Erdmann yesterday to draw up a resolution setting forth the group's grievances. The class of production coming through right now is not encouraging enough to warrant a continued full-week business, Erdmann said. Your members have little choice except to close up until Hollywood comes to our aid with better pictures."

Quality Not Responsible . . .

WHAT Hollywood producers and theatre operators do not seem to take into account is that the present box-office slump is not due to the poor quality of the pictures being made. Pictures are not getting worse. If anything, they are getting better as individual units of entertainment. The loud talking which made most of them disturbing to listen to, is now in evidence in only the few made by incompetent directors; casts are strong by virtue of a greater

supply of talent than the studios can use, and visually and technically there is nothing lacking in the product now being offered exhibitors. The box-office slump is due to the nature, not the quality, of current pictures. It is the slump which the *Spectator* eight years ago warned producers was inevitable, although at the time of uttering the warning I did not credit audience resistance with strength enough to last for a full eight years of aural entertainment as a substitute for the visual entertainment which laid the powerful foundation upon which the present film structure is beginning to shake. I thought that *talk-ing* pictures would have a shorter life as a substitute for *motion* pictures.

What Will Producers Do? . . .

BUT the thing which matters now is that the present form of entertainment is on its last legs. What are producers going to do about it? As they do not know the nature of the ailment, they are going to find it difficult to determine the nature of the remedy which should be applied. As they get their own importance from the absurdly large salaries they draw, they think they can stem the ebbing box-office tide by absurd extravagance in the making of gigantic pictures. As they survey themselves and realize what money has done for them, it is perhaps natural they should think that money also can put an outward glitter on screen entertainment to blind the public to the lack of merit within. They have forced so much glitter on the cinematic market, that plain, substantial, human-interest goods fail to find a ready sale. And now the glitter is wearing out its welcome. That may prove to be a blessing in disguise. It may drive the industry back into the business it abandoned when it went over wholly to sound.

Commercials to the Rescue . . .

MEANWHILE, what about exhibitors? I can see no relief for them. The few good big pictures cost them so much there is little profit in showing them, and the many good little pictures are not drawing audiences because the public is tiring of stories told in dialogue instead of by the camera. Commercial films offer exhibitors a little relief. I saw one the other day, a ten-minute technicolor short quite entertaining enough to get a place on the biggest theatre's screen. *Boy Meets Dog* is a cartoon

Every Two Weeks During July and August

(Reprinted from the previous edition)

WHEN, in the September 11 issue of the *Spectator* it was announced that after ten years of publication as a bi-weekly, it thereafter would be a weekly, we forgot to add "except during July and August of each year." During these two summer months sensible people do not wish to spend too much time in serious mental occupation. Another consideration is that the hundreds of schools and colleges which use the *Spectator* in their Motion Picture Appreciation classes, are closed for the summer. And—if you want the real low-down—I find that writing any share of a *Spectator* every week is about the nearest approach to perpetual motion the world has achieved. In me is a deep yearning for even one day of sitting in the shade

of a tree, blinking at nothing whatever and thinking of even less.

So, during July and August hereafter you will get a *Spectator* every two weeks instead of every week, and, because we failed to warn you of it, your current subscription will be extended to include the fifty-two issues you paid for when you renewed your subscription for, or subscribed during, the current year.

All the pictures previewed during the two months will be reviewed as usual, the only difference being that they will come to you in bi-weekly batches, instead of weekly. And for each issue I will get back into my Easy Chair just long enough to keep from going stale. For the rest of the time I will do nothing as violently as I can.

phantasy, produced and directed by Walter Lantz, one of whose *Oswald* cartoons Universal releases every two weeks. *Boy Meets Dog* is a commercial film, but in its 860 feet of film it has but eighteen feet of advertising in the form of a billboard advertising Caravel toothpaste. In as far as I was concerned as audience, the little picture entertained me. It has an excellent musical score composed by Frank Churchill, whose contribution to *Snow White* is a big factor in its success; and Nathaniel Shilkret directed the music for the little picture. That it advertised something made it no less entertaining. Exhibitors are paid to show it, so much a seat; thus it earns them something, pleases their audiences, and saves them from having to buy film to fill the place it occupies on the screen. Commercial films have a chance to reach film audiences, but their films should be made by people who are experienced in making screen entertainment.

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CHILD PLAYERS AND THE PUBLIC . . .

ONE of the most absurd beliefs of motion picture producers is that all child players please audiences solely because they are children and appeal principally to children. "When the children cease wanting to see Shirley Temple on the screen," a producer friend said to me the other day, "her box-office value will dwindle almost to the vanishing point, as parents, no longer under obligation to accompany their children to her pictures, also will cease attending them." I assured my friend that he was exceedingly insane, and refused to argue the matter, basing my refusal upon the ground that the utterances of an insane person are unanswerable. Reading the morning paper with my after-dinner pipe that evening—as I always do—I discovered that the 108th Medical Regiment of the Illinois National Guard had notified Shirley, "of her appointment as honorary colonel of the regiment, together with a half-dozen medals and citations . . . that Shirley was cited for 'giving the world so many

hours of pleasure'." It would be interesting to know how the children of the officers forced them to do such honor to a child who appeals only to children. Or perhaps the officers did it off their own bats. The truth is that Shirley, and all really clever child players, appeal more to adults than to children. Jackie Cooper is the latest youngster to prove that there need be no lapse in the career from childhood to old age if he has anything to offer after he grows out of babyhood.

* * *

CATCHING UP WITH CORRESPONDENTS . . .

ONE would think that a man whose business it is to write, never would allow unanswered correspondence to pile up accusingly on whatever he uses for a desk. That is what I do. In front of my easy chair is a detached piece of stuffed furniture—a what you call it?—A hassock? Scarcely, as I recall a line from a George Eliot books, "He knelt with one knee on a hassock to survey her." To get only one knee on my dingbat he would have to lie on one side on the floor and hoist his upper leg, and that would give him a cockeyed view of her. Ottoman? Wait a minute. . . . My dictionary tells me an ottoman is "a movable, carpet-covered footstool." Except for the carpet, that describes the thing I keep my unanswered correspondence on until the pile gets so high it begins to shed letters onto the floor. There are some there now and it clearly is up to me to do something about it. Most of the letters I get are nice ones which feed my ego when I read them, even though I never seem to have time to acknowledge them. H. B. Tuttle, for instance, writes from Meridian, Mississippi: "Surely your plea to Hollywood to lift its voice on behalf of peace will bring results. We need a great anti-war picture." You are getting it, Mr. Tuttle. Walter Wanger has made it—*Blockade*. . . . Will the writers of several hundred other letters dealing with the same subject, please note? . . . Those who have written me since *Blockade* was previewed seem disposed

to give the *Spectator* credit for stirring up things until this anti-war picture came as an answer to its plea. It is nice of them, but I am sure Walter had the picture in mind before the *Spectator* began its whooping-up. . . . Jean Rowley, Vancouver, B. C., is getting tired of so few good big pictures and so many bad little ones, and several other letters have the same idea in them. Will their writers accept that as a general acknowledgement? . . . To those who write asking me who is going to marry whom, I would like to say once more that the *Spectator* does not keep track of, speculate upon, or print news of, Hollywood romances. . . . To those who have written about Shirley Temple's vacation trip, I would say that I have heard it from both Mr. and Mrs. Temple that Shirley is going to be guarded against too much public contact while traveling, that the trip is a sincere effort to show her something new and, as far as is humanly possible, to give her a complete rest. . . . That clears the floor. Now if I can get out gingerly without knocking off any more unanswered mail—

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TWO WISE MEN SPEAK . . .

OF COURSE, neither of them had the eventuality of talkies in his mind when he penned his remark on silence, but both quotations have significance from a screen entertainment standpoint. Shakespeare: "Silence is the perfectest herald of joy. I were little happy if I could say how much." Carlyle: "Silence is deep as eternity; speech is shallow as time."

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ORCHESTRAS ARE TOO LARGE . . .

THAT all talking pictures should have continuous backgrounds of music is recognized by those who have an intelligent grasp of the fundamentals of the screen as a medium of entertainment. In many instances continuous scores are recorded, but as yet none has reached the screen in its entirety. Orchestras of fifty or sixty pieces record the scores independently of the action, and when the music is being synchronized with dialogue scenes, it is found impossible to reduce the volume of sound sufficiently to make the dialogue as audible as it should be. Stepping-down the music enough to keep it from interfering with the dialogue, eliminates the sound of all the base instruments and leaves only the sound of the higher notes to be heard by the audience. This destroys the effect of the score as recorded by the large orchestra, consequently such scenes as it would spoil reach the screen without any musical accompaniment. That is why we do not have continuous scores, even though they have been recorded. No art creation, however, should be the victim of any weakness of its technique.

Difficulty Can Be Overcome . . .

WE SHOULD have continuous scores, and the difficulty of getting them must be overcome if our pictures are to give full satisfaction and thus attain their maximum box-office strength. If the volume of the music played by a full orchestra must be reduced to the point of distortion to keep it from in-

terfering with the dialogue, it would seem obvious that the thing to do would be to reduce the number of instruments when the scores for such scenes were being recorded. A string quartette, or perhaps a sextette, could carry on the score with well balanced music, free of distortion, which would not interfere with the audience's reception of the dialogue. That the music of a large orchestra cannot be stepped down far enough to make it possible, is a lame excuse for not providing the desired continuous score. If complete scripts are written as far in advance of shooting as they should be, the size of the orchestra to provide the music to accompany each scene could be determined, thus making it possible to use all the score recorded.

* * *

HIS BARK AND HIS BITE . . .

OCCASIONALLY one of the brickbats which inevitably come the way of an editor who writes exactly what he thinks, has an aftermath that gives it a comedy turn. In my review of a major picture, the screen play for which was written by—let us call him Joe Doakes—I wrote that Mr. Doakes made a poor job of it and gave the director a script which could not be made into an entertaining picture. After the *Spectator* containing the review was circulated, Doakes called me up. He said that previously he had read me solely for the laughs my ignorance of the screen gave him, but that after reading my opinion of his most recent screen play, he was so fed up with my bleatings that he found them more nauseating than funny, and would I please take his name off the *Spectator* circulation list? I did so. Yesterday I was in the writer's building on the lot where Doakes works. Another writer accosted me in the corridor. "I want to pay for a *Spectator* subscription for the man in the office next to mine," he said. "He grabs mine the day it comes and I can't get it back until he is through reading it. His name is Joe Doakes."

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COMMERCIAL FILMS IN DEMAND . . .

HOLLYWOOD film producers turn thumbs down on commercial pictures made to exploit some article of commerce. Irrespective of how entertaining such pictures might be, Will Hays has put his royal ban on them. In its issue of April 9, the *Spectator* had this to say about them: "Everything you wear, eat or see in your home could be the subject of an interesting short subject. *Flour From the Field to the Flapjack* could hold the interest of an audience if presented in an interesting manner and even if it had a Gold Medal or Globe A emblem on it. I suppose the film industry does not wish commercial firms to make pictures and give them to exhibitors without cost. What is to prevent the film industry from making deals with the firms to make the pictures, getting its profits in a lump sum from the firms and giving the exhibitors the pictures for nothing? The profit to exhibitors would be what they would save by not having to buy something to fill the spot on their screens the commercials would fill." Weekly *Variety* of May 11 discusses the commercial film situation in

Pennsylvania, which I suppose is about the same as elsewhere. The opening paragraph of *Variety's* dispatch from Philadelphia: "With theatre biz in the nabes off brutally, commercial reels, which came into the Pennsylvania territory strong about a year ago, have spurted during the past few weeks. Seeking any straw by which to claw down overhead, theatre operators are grabbing for the advertising films whenever available. That takes in Philadelphia as well as the lesser exhibits in the backwoods."

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RECIPE FOR VARIETY . . .

AN OHIO exhibitor writes to ask me if I cannot start a campaign for the injection of something new to relieve the everlasting sameness of Westerns. I do not know what can be done about it. All the plots have been used hundreds of times, and the only new thing I can suggest is to make a picture in which all the horses do not go at breakneck speed every time we see them on the screen. A real novelty would be a Western in which the horses walk.

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ANYTHING TO HURT BUSINESS . . .

A FILM commentator writes: "Like it or not, there probably will be a deluge of pictures exploiting the glamour of cafe life and celebrities." At the top of the list of things in which the great majority of picture patrons have no interest whatever, I would put cafe life and celebrities. Producers seem determined to prolong the box-office drought.

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RAISES QUESTION OF SANITY . . .

WHEN a stage actor attracts attention to himself by an outstanding performance on the New York stage, he is brought to Hollywood to take the place in a picture of some screen actor, already here, who has attracted attention to himself by many outstanding performances on the screen. It is a practice which makes us wonder if motion picture producers are quite sane.

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SOME UNCONSCIOUS COMEDY . . .

AMONG the funny things one occasionally finds to read are the published interviews with motion picture bigwigs who tell us solemnly how long the present box-office depression will last and what the next trend in motion picture entertainment will be. Motion picture producers, as I have said several times in past *Spectators*, are the only executives in the world who never under any circumstances make a mistake. The present box-office slump is not due to their failure to give the public what it wants; it is due entirely to the public's stupidity in not patronizing what it gets. That is the way producers reason. The hypnotic effect induced by the size of their salary checks makes it impossible for them to reason in any other way. The funniest thing, however, is the fact of there being scientists at work to determine in ad-

vance the drift of audience fancy, to enable producers to have the right pictures at hand when one trend dies and another is born. When we reflect upon the existence of such practices as that, we see not only the reason for the poor state of film finances at present, but also little hope that conditions will be improved before new brains enter the business of making screen entertainment.

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MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

HE WAS limping painfully along the road; I stopped and picked him up; between sobs he told me a pitiful story; he was running as fast as he could to a film studio to sell a story, skidded in taking a corner and sprained his ankle; that slowed him up and he arrived at the studio after all the executives had left for the Inglewood race track. . . . When I think of something that will make a line or two in "Meanderings," I make a note of it, thus making the writing of them merely a routine job of putting them in shape for the printer; today I have not even one note, thus the bottom of the column seems an appalling distance from here. . . . What to do? . . . The dogs and I have the whole place to ourselves; no one else at home. . . . Seems strange that after making flowers with their color and perfume, putting musical murmurs in the beds of brooks and songs in the throats of birds, creating the sun and clouds to paint sunsets on the western sky, and doing a thousand other things to make the world an ideal spot, the Creator put Man in it to mess it up. . . . Wish I had turned on the light before going to sleep last night and made a note of the sparkling idea I had for a line or two here. . . . Think I'll go out and mow the back lawn. . . . A bone the spaniel left on the lawn got jammed in the mower; left it there, filled my pipe and visited Sophie, the duck, who seems to be taking plenty of time to coax little ducks out of the eggs she has been setting on since heaven knows when. . . . Wonderful gladiolus, the one that is holding its bloom above the gold of the coreopsis through which it has thrust its way upward. . . . Just snapped off the ends of some drooping branches of a pepper tree that were denying the new zinnia bed the sunshine it should have. . . . A peddler came down our dirt road; hailed me; I bought a pair of shoe laces; after he poked it through the fence I paid him and asked him what he thought of the New Deal; he said he supposed it was all right; uninteresting fellow. . . . Seems Mrs. Spectator ought to be back from the hair dressers by this time. . . . Wonder what's on the radio this time of day. . . . Nothing interesting. . . . Soon will have to cut the chrysanthemums back to assure abundant bloom in the fall. . . . The dogs have run to the gate; the car must be coming. . . . It's Mrs. Spectator, and with her, I think—yes, she has Wendy, the most adorable three-year-old granddaughter in the whole wide world! Excuse me. . . . *Extra! Extra! Sophie the duck just hatched out a half dozen ducklings! Wendy and I greatly excited!*

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

HOKUM TALKED TO DEATH . . .

● **MY BILL;** Warners release of First National production; associate producer, Bryan Foy; directed by John Farrow; screen play by Vincent Sherman and Robertson White; from the play, "Courage," by Tom Barry; dialogue director, Vincent Sherman; assistant director, Russ Saunders; photographed by Sid Hickox; art director, Max Parker; film editor, Frank Magee; gowns, Orry-Kelly; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein. Cast: Kay Francis, Bonita Granville, Anita Louise, Bobby Jordan, John Litel, Dickie Moore, Maurice Murphy, Elisabeth Risdon, Helena Phillips Evans, John Ridgely, Jan Holm, Sidney Bracy, Bernice Pilot.

WHAT is the matter with the box-office? See *My Bill* for answer. It is a dialogue marathon, a stream of speeches so full of words that in hurling them at one another, the players have no time for shading, emphasis or pauses to give them meaning. The story is rich in human values—good, old down-to-earth hokum all of us love, the kind that gained the screen its first audience because it proved a better medium than the stage for the presentation of hokumish story material. The stage presented hokum in the raw; the screen, lacking a voice, had to be content with suggesting it, thus leaving its interpretation to the imagination of each member of the audience. The death-knell of stage hokum was sounded as soon as the screen began to function. *My Bill* reverts to the ancient formula, talks, talks, talks. What might have been a deeply human picture becomes just another talkie of the sort responsible for the present distress of film box-offices. It does not reveal in even one scene the remotest understanding of the screen as a medium.

If Bryan Understood . . .

THE efforts of John Farrow, director, to provide an undercurrent of physical action for the flow of words, constitute a further aggravation. As the script provided for continuous talking, Farrow endeavors to make it look like a motion picture by keeping his characters in motion while reading the lines. Physically the picture is about as lively as it would have been if made by a cast of fleas, which makes it as hard to look at as it is to listen to. When a story is told in dialogue, the dialogue should have the right of way. Farrow, so to speak, makes us chase the characters around the sets to keep abreast of what they are saying. John Litel, for instance, playing a bank president, does not sit in his chair behind his desk and listen to what his customers are saying, as bank presidents do in real life. He bobs up and down and paces his office floor so briskly that our attention is diverted from what he is saying to what he is doing. All the other characters are directed in the same way. The fault, of course, lay in the first instance with Bryan Foy for allowing such a script to go into production. The cheaper, class B pictures which he makes, lend themselves, with the smallest financial risk, to back-to-cinematic-sanity experimentation, but he and other class B producers seem to have no realization of the fact of their being responsible for exhibitor worries. If Bryan could understand he is in

the motion picture business, not the business of photographing stage dialogue, *My Bill* could have been one of the most appealing little pictures of the year.

Dickie Moore Scores a Knockout . . .

EVEN with the ceaseless chatter and senseless hopping about of its characters, the story of *My Bill* will hold your attention if you are in an indulgent mood. You will not walk out on it until you see Aunt Caroline get hers. She is the meanest meanie we have had in a long time, thanks to the skilful characterization of Elisabeth Risdon, and the way she treats our bewildered and distressed heroine (Kay Francis) makes us so anxious to see her get her comeuppance that we feel like standing up and cheering when she gets it. Kay's performance is a really fine one, even though she does look rather young to be the mother of Anita Louise. The hit of the picture, however, is Dickie Moore. One of the many manifestations of the screen industry's mental incompetence is that a child who pleases audiences when four years of age cannot please them at any other age. Only a few weeks ago I expressed a contrary opinion in my *Easy Chair* mumblings. Dickie pleased at four because he had something he still will have at forty and during all the intervening years. Even so, we have seen him but seldom of late; but now Bryan Foy has discovered him again, and if he (Bryan) has as much gumption as I think he has along some lines, we will see Dickie's name at the head of some Foy casts in pictures—let us pray fervently—which will reveal at least a little recognition of the camera's status as the screen's story-telling medium. Anita Louise, Maurice Murphy, Bonita Granville and Bobby Jordan are four talented young people who give satisfaction. John Litel and Helena Evans contribute understanding performances, Litel's role, however, being rather conventional, but Miss Evans has opportunities, of which she avails herself, to give a brilliant characterization.

ONE YOU SHOULD SEE . . .

● **LORD JEFF;** Metro release of a Sam Wood production; produced by Frank Davis; directed by Sam Wood; screen play by James Kelvin McGuinness; from a story by Bradford Ropes, Val Burton and Endre Bohem; musical score, Edward Ward; photography, John Seitz; film editor, Frank E. Hull. Cast: Freddie Bartholomew, Mickey Rooney, Charles Coburn, Herbert Mundin, Terry Kilburn, Gale Sondergaard, Peter Lawford, Walter Tetley, Peter Ellis, George Zucco, Matthew Boulton, John Burton, Emma Dunn, Monty Woolley, Gilbert Emery, Charles Irwin, Walter Kingsford.

NOT to be missed. Sam Wood again demonstrates his ability to get outstanding performances from a cast of youngsters. In Freddie Bartholomew, Mickey Rooney and Terry Kilburn he has three young troupers who respond to his direction with characterizations the most experienced adult actors could not make more convincing. *Lord Jeff*, however, gets its main strength from the fact that its story is about something. The Barnado Homes have been a factor in British charitable activity for seventy years, and many orphans whom they cared for and

educated, have risen to high places in Great Britain's far flung empire. *Lord Jeff* shows the workings of one of the Barnado institutions, and so well have the operating scenes been woven into the story, they constitute one of the most entertaining features of the picture. The human element is provided by the screen play's presentation of Freddie as a typical specimen of the orphans the institutions turn into useful citizens. His characterization parallels the one he had in *Captains Courageous*—an impossible snob at the outset, a nice, human boy at the end. In all phases of his performances Freddie again proves himself an admirable little actor, one whose career can surmount the "awkward age" myth. That should bring comfort to the battery of lawyers who live off his earnings.

Youngsters and Adults Please . . .

ANOTHER who again emphatically demonstrates his superb acting ability, is Mickey Rooney. Here we have him playing an English boy in a cast otherwise composed of young Britishers, and he is as British as the most British of the rest of them. And there is another wee mite of a boy, Terry Kilburn, who will capture the hearts of the world. "Alone worth the price of admission," can be said of Terry's performance. And there are a lot of other boys who prove strong competition for the adult members of the cast. Sam Wood presents them to us as just what they are—boys, not actors, likable little fellows who make themselves believable in response to Sam's brilliant direction. Adults to fill the parts were selected wisely. Charles Coburn, a really great actor; Herbert Mundin, George Zucco, John Burton, are among the men who make the story convincing. There are but two women in the cast, Gale Sondergaard and Emma Dunn. Why we do not see both of them more frequently is among the queer things which make it so hard to understand the film industry. Miss Sondergaard's performance in *Anthony Adverse* stamped her as an actress of great ability, yet her appearances since then have been far apart. Miss Dunn is among our most human and likable character actresses, yet she, too, is seen but seldom.

Credits a Mathematical Puzzle . . .

ONE thing *Lord Jeff* demonstrates is that a good screen story can get along without a romance. Miss Sondergaard and Miss Dunn constitute the sole female element in the picture, and they have no romantic scenes. The story, however, makes an obeisance to screen traditions by including a pair of jewel thieves to give it a dash of melodrama. The story is credited as the joint work of Bradford Ropes, Val Burton and Endre Boham. James Kevin McGuinness is credited with the screen play, even though with mathematical precision and at considerable expense he revealed in trade paper advertisements that of the 1030 lines of dialogue in the script he had written but 853. The story is credited solely to the three writers mentioned above, even though we are assured by the same advertisements that Jim wrote two-thirds of it. I am glad I did not recall the advertise-

ments while I was reviewing the picture. Trying to estimate the relative merits of Jim's 853 lines and those of the fatherless 177 would have been too much. *Lord Jeff* is, on the whole, a rather serious picture, and as Jim must have had a lot of the spirit of good, clean fun left over after comedy touches had been dotted here and there in his two-thirds of the story, he apparently used the comedy he still had on hand to make his claim for credit as funny as possible.

Technicians Contribute a Lot . . .

VISUALLY the picture is as English as its cast and story. Even after a dozen years of intimate contact with film production, I still marvel at the extraordinary accomplishments of studio technicians. Even though *Lord Jeff* was shot in its entirety in or near what we call Hollywood, it brings England to us as convincingly as if the production were made in the locale of the story. Cedric Gibbons and his associates again demonstrate their extreme cleverness in making a month-old interior look as if it were built a century ago. The camera of John Seitz brings to the screen a succession of notable examples of photography, and Frank Hull has provided intelligent film editing. This Sam Wood production was produced by Frank Davis. You will have to figure that out without my help. It has me puzzled. But there is enough merit in *Lord Jeff* to distribute credit for it among a large number of people and give each a large helping.

PURELY ASTROLOGICAL STUDY . . .

● **WHEN WERE YOU BORN?**; Warner Bros.; associate producer, Bryan Foy; director, William McGann; original story, Manly Hall; screen play, Anthony Coldewey; photographer, L. William O'Connell; film editor, Doug Gould; assistant director, Russ Saunders; dialogue director, John Langan; art director, Hugh Reticker; sound, Stanley Jones; gowns, Howard Shoup. Cast: Margaret Lindsay, Anna May Wong, Lola Lane, Anthony Averill, Charles Wilson, Frank Jaquet, Eric Stanley, James Stephenson, Jeffrey Lynn, Leonard Mudie, Maurice Cass, Jack Moore, Olin Howland.

THE question-mark you will find above after the name of the picture is by courtesy of the *Spectator*. On the screen there is no such mark, an interrogation point apparently being held by Warner Brothers to be among the things whose use depends upon the whim of the person who writes the question. But here its absence starts the picture off under a handicap; you think you are going to get a dose of low-brow entertainment. Speedily you find yourself mistaken; the darned thing goes highbrow with a bang.



Hollywood Cat & Dog Hospital

Dr. H. R. Fosbinder, Veterinarian

1151 No. Highland Ave. - HO. 3616

"Where Pets are Treated Right"

drags you into an astrological maze, carries you to the most advanced outpost of five thousand years of study of the oldest science known to man. It may be that the science is itself old enough to go the rest of the way without the aid of such frills as question-marks. Among the things the Warner publicity department tells us about the science is that, "The Japanese always fight their wars by astrology, as do the Chinese." That rather bewilders the layman; no matter how the present Oriental war comes out, astrology both wins and loses.

Millions Can't Be Wrong . . .

WE ARE told further that two-thirds of the people of the world believe in astrology, that in this country five million people are students of it. Any science owning so many believers is entitled to respectful consideration, and any picture producer is justified in making a picture to appeal to such a large audience of believers and students. The picture, though, should be reviewed by a believer or a student, and the *Spectator* staff does not include either. My ignorance of the science is too complete to qualify me to judge the merits of a screen production which is composed wholly of it. The accomplished Anna May Wong reads in James Stephenson's horoscope that he has but two more days to live, and before the time is up, he is murdered. That would suggest the thought that if we had more horoscope readers we could get along with fewer police officers; and as the murder mystery is solved by astrology, its general application to criminal investigation should be followed by a reduction in the number of salaried detectives. *When Were You Born?* has me puzzled.

Box-Office Success Problematical . . .

FOR whom, then, was the picture made? Certainly not for me or for you, if you share my ignorance of the science. It plumps us into the most advanced class before we even enter the kindergarten class. It is a demonstration of something in which we have not been interested sufficiently to make even an elementary study of it. It is difficult to entertain us with something about which we know nothing, and knowing nothing—as is the way with ignorance—it is difficult for us to believe that what we see happen really could happen. The picture did not entertain me. It contains too much astrology, which I do not understand, and too little of the worldly things I do understand. It must be left to the box-office to determine the wisdom or lack of it in the selection of

such an abstruse theme for what is designed as a piece of entertainment for universal consumption.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING . . .

● **WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN; MGM; producer, Edward Chodorov; director, Robert B. Sinclair; screen play, Edward Chodorov; story, Margaret Culkin Banning; photographer, Ray June; film editor, George Boemler; musical score, Dr. William Axt; art director, Cedric Gibbons. Cast: Herbert Marshall, Virginia Bruce, Mary Astor, Janet Beecher, Marjorie Rambeau, Juanita Quigley, Zeffie Tilbury, Sarah Padden, Betty Ross Clarke, Dorothy Christy, Morgan Wallace, Joseph Creehan.**

THEY make ones like this and then wonder what is the matter with the box-office. Technically as polished a job as any that have added to the fame of Metro as a producing organization; beautifully acted, directed astonishingly well when we consider it was done by a man fresh from the stage and without any previous screen experience, *Woman Against Woman* still will do nothing to lighten the box-office gloom. It is not interesting. In this day when divorces are one of our routine social customs the picture asks us to believe that Herbert Marshall's action in divorcing Mary Astor shocks the social set into a state that makes all Marshall's old friends turn frigid backs on Virginia Bruce when, a year later, she becomes the bride of Marshall and moves to the city in which he is a leading attorney. The dullest person in the audience can see that Marshall is justified in divorcing Mary—such impression must be created or there would be no story—but Virginia is the only one in the picture who realizes it. Even Marshall's mother takes the side of the divorced wife.

Lacking in Mass Appeal . . .

AND that is the story which invites our close attention. Marshall, around whom the story revolves, is a weakling who after several years as Mary's husband, is not as wise to her as Virginia becomes at first glance. And no one will believe that woman's instinct would not make the mother of the husband see through the divorced wife just as readily. But, in any event, the whole thing is a tempest in a teapot, with significance only to the three leading characters and without general application to social conditions. In story form it could make placid reading and on the stage it could become a polite discussion of interest to sophisticated audiences which assemble more to see performances than to be told stories; but it lacks the mass appeal a screen story must have to make a picture a box-office success. Aping the stage has brought on the present film box-office depression, and *Woman Against Woman* is just another adventure in aping. It lacks the action audiences look for on the screen, has no gripping scene to relieve its excessive politeness, points no moral, is confined strictly within its own borders. That, of course, is the man's view. It may mean more to women, but I doubt it.

All Performances Satisfactory . . .

THE triviality of the story is brought out vividly in its abrupt ending. At a social gathering of the same people who previously had insulted the charm-



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ing Virginia Bruce by turning cold shoulders to her, Mary Astor goes to the table at which Virginia and Marshall are seated, smiles and compliments the bride on the nice gown she is wearing, a scene staged for the gaping onlookers—and all is forgiven. Complications which can be straightened out by the smile of a designing woman, lack the strength necessary to make them sufficiently gripping for screen story material. However, as I have said, the whole thing is done beautifully, with the best of taste. Virginia Bruce, beautiful, talented, handles her part with as much spirit as its extreme politeness permits. Marshall makes the most of his backboneless role and is less puffy about the eyes than he has been of late. Mary Astor gives a really arresting performance as a poor loser, who, even if she does not love her former husband, does her best to wreck his second marriage. She, too, is very polite. Janet Beecher, one of our really fine actresses, is outstanding in the dubious role of the mother whose sympathies are for the divorced wife of her son. I never have known her to give a poor performance, one not distinguished by intelligent understanding. Marjorie Rambeau, stunning looking, gives the production its only gay moments, although Zeffie Tilbury's grandmother characterization perks it up in spots. Sarah Padden does a striking dramatic bit. We get a glimpse of Dorothy Christy, a girl who should be given more opportunities. Edward Chodorov, in his joint capacity as scenarist and producer, made the most of what opportunities, both literary and physical, the story material provided. And Cedric Gibbons and associates, of course, made the production a most artistic one to which Ray June's photography does full justice.

CHILD ACTRESS SCORES . . .

● **CITY STREETS**; Columbia production and release; directed by Albert S. Rogell; associate producer, Wallace MacDonald; features Edith Fellows and Leo Carrillo; story by I. Bernstein; screen play by Fred Niblo, Jr., and Lou Breslow; assistant director, William Mull; photography, Alan Seigler; film editor, Viola Lawrence; music director, Morris Stoloff. Supporting cast: Tommy Bond, Mary Gordon, Helen Jerome Eddy, Joseph King, Frank Sheridan, Arthur Loft, George Humbert, Franch Reicher, Grace Goodall.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

EDITH FELLOWS again reveals herself as a young actress of great emotional power. In the difficult role of a cripple child, which requires that she remain in a wheel-chair during most of the picture, she makes the screen alive with a beauty of spirit and with pathos. Particularly telling was the scene in which, though her limbs are held rigidly in iron braces, she waltzes about the room in her chair, giving the wheels quick little pushes between the gestures she makes like those of a ballerina. A most promising young artist. Leo Carrillo, as the Italian grocer who takes the girl under his devoted care upon the death of her mother, also has some fine moments. Especially poignant and sincere was his prayer, before a church altar, that the child, following an operation, might be made to walk again. Unfortunately many of his

lighter scenes were marred by the obvious lingual distortions which the dialogue required him to speak—"poultry" for "poetry", "sturgeon" for "surgeon" and the like—all savoring of vaudeville patter and quite out of key with the general tone of the picture.

Recalls the Good Old Days . . .

IN NUMEROUS scenes Director Albert Rogell evinces unusual imagination and feeling. There is an entire sequence which is practically silent, in which the camera follows Carrillo as he plunges, ill, through the rain and up the stairs to his miserable lodgings and then down again to the street, the voice of the child, who has been taken away from him, growing in his ears until at last he collapses on the sidewalk. Morris Stoloff has built this scene with a powerful musical score, and an excellent piece of photographic craftsmanship has been done by Alan Seigler. A bouquet also to Viola Lawrence, editor, for maintaining the integrity of this and other scenes having sustained camera work. Viewing the picture as a whole, however, it misses excellence as screen entertainment because it frequently goes overboard into sentimentality; because there are irrelevant humorous digressions in parts of the film, while at other times situations should have been more carefully built to be convincing; and because some of the comedy portions are too broad in style to blend with the heavy scenes. Of course, it is evident that the makers of the picture were guided by the objective of turning out a film which would appeal especially to children and family audiences, and this it should do. But I do not think these factions would have enjoyed the film any less had it been made with a more consistent observance of good screen craft, and others of the picture-going public would have liked it a great deal more. Outstanding among the players are Tommy Bond, a likable youngster overbrimming with ginger, Mary Gordon, as his Irish mother, Helen Jerome Eddy and Frank Sheridan.

REFORMATORY IS REFORMED . . .

● **REFORMATORY**; Larry Darmour production for Columbia release; producer, Larry Darmour; director, Lewis D. Collins; original screen play by Gordon Rigby; assistant director, Carl Hiecke; photography by James S. Brown, Jr.; film editor, Dwight Caldwell; sound engineer, Tom Lambert. Cast: Jack Holt, Bobby Jordan, Tommy Bupp, Frankie Darro, Charlotte Wynters, Grant Mitchell, Ward Bond, Sheila Bromley, Paul Everton, Lloyd Ingraham, Joe Cairns.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

A RATHER good little melodrama, considering that it is evidently a low-budget picture. It has a good deal of human interest, the plot hangs together well, and the action is smooth. The picture is especially creditable because of its theme, despite the fact that *Reformatory* manifestly follows in the wake of *Crime School* and other similar sociological films, and probably was produced with the thought of benefiting no one, but of making money. Whatever the motive for its production, though, the picture undoubtedly will contribute toward making the public more aware of the need for social reforms and of

its responsibility in seeing that they are brought about. Of course, the case presented for the boys in *Reformatory* is probably one-sided. I cannot speak with authority, but I doubt very much if the youngsters at any reformatory in this country live under such completely appalling conditions as those pictured here. Moreover, one is not prone to believe, as is here contended, that reform school boys in the aggregate are really little angels, who will flower into stanch and virtuous young manhood once cruel guards are dismissed, physical punishment abolished, attractive uniforms, good food, and a gymnasium provided, and the honor system instituted.

Expresses a Truth . . .

NEVERTHELESS, the picture unquestionably points out many of the abuses associated to some extent with the management of such institutions; and it gives expression, in a gross sort of way, to a truth—that many boys in such places are being hardened and embittered by unsympathetic and harsh treatment who might be made into good citizens. The story serves well its star, Jack Holt, who is convincing and likable as the new superintendent with advanced ideas. Several children do very capable work, reflecting the experienced directorial hand of Lewis D. Collins. Bobby Jordan, as a youngster who is completely taken in by the new honor system, does the most notable work of the boys. Tommy Bupp is amusing as a habitual liar, and Frankie Darro gives a well punctuated performance as an incorrigible deliberately sent to the school to make trouble by an enemy of the superintendent. Charlotte Wynters, Sheila Bromley, Grant Mitchell and Ward Bond are efficient in small parts. The sets unfortunately reveal the low expenditure allotted to them, though James S. Brown's photography is satisfactory.

DOES NOT REALIZE POSSIBILITIES . . .

● **ROMANCE OF THE LIMBERLOST**; Monogram picture and release; producer, Scott R. Dunlap; director, William Nigh; photography, Gilbert Warrenton; film editor, Russell Schoengarth; musical director, Abe Meyer; technical director, E. R. Hickson; screen play by Marion Orth; suggested by Gene Stratton Porter's novel, "Girl of the Limberlost." Cast: Jean Parker, Eric Linden, Marjorie Main, Edward Pawley, Hollis Jewell, George Cleveland, Betty Blythe, Sara Padden, Guy Usher, Jack Kennedy, Jean O'Neill, Harry Harve.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

SOME vivid performances, direction of sometimes distinguished sensitiveness, and fine scenic investiture make of *Romance of the Limberlost* an independent production possessing considerably greater quality than the average of such films. There are moments of poetic charm and of touching humanness in this tale of a girl of the swamps who dreams of rising to a higher station in life. Occasional naivete in handling the story material, however, robs it of complete genuineness, and makes dubious the appeal of the film for discriminating audiences. Of course, the fiction of Gene Stratton Porter, one of whose novels "suggested" the present screen play, was characterized by sentimentality and not always deft char-

acterization, but the story outline of the present film seems plausible material. One is inclined to lay the fault of the picture—its frequent reversion to the *Little Nell* school of melodrama—to the screen play, to that and to occasional directorial lapses in the way of heavy-handedness. I am considering the picture as it stacks up with other films suitable for showing in first-class houses, as well as in the light of what this picture might have been if the whole were as meritorious as some of its parts. It has many elements, including strong social and personal conflicts in the story, which should make it successful before small-town audiences and their counterparts elsewhere.

Pro and Con . . .

WILLIAM NIGH'S chief excellence as a director is the sensitiveness with which he deals with human problems, his understanding of people, his appreciation of emotional values, which he has shown in this and earlier pictures. His shortcomings are his neglect to make this analytical faculty serve him constantly and fully; a tendency toward stiffness in his camera work; and a frequent unevenness in his action. In the present film important developments in the story tumble onto each other in successive scenes; they are not spaced or developed so as to convey their full significance or to give a rhythm to the movement of the story. In some scenes good use is made of pans and truck shots, but at other times, particularly at the first of the film, there is a sterile succession of straight shots, unrelieved even by sufficient close-ups. It is impossible, of course, to say definitely where the work of the screen writer or the editor ends and that of the director begins, but in judging motion pictures one tends to place great responsibility on the director. Certainly he can do much to improve a faulty script by his handling of it.

Jean Parker Impresses . . .

THE bright and shining light of the picture is the beauteous Jean Parker, who gives us some seemingly inspired moments, investing her part with a gentleness, spirituality and sorrow which make her portrayal come close to being a truly splendid one. Also outstanding is Betty Blythe, as a cultivated and sympathetic benefactor, doing by far the best work she has done in talking pictures. Another capable performance is that of Eric Linden, as a young attorney. Marjorie Main, seen as the girl's domineering aunt, who would marry her off to a cruel drunkard for money, brings force to her characterization, and in snatches, as toward the end, when her hardness weakens, she is really impressive, but in many scenes she is much too heavy. Edward Pawley, the brute, though a good trouser, errs in the same direction. Altogether fetching, however, is Sara Padden in her simple, homey portrayal, which is complemented, and complements, a vigorous and convincing performance of George Cleveland, as her husband. Hollis Jewell, Guy Usher and others are competent. Considerable care has been given the sets and technical details, and commendable atmosphere of the 1905 period results. Gilbert Warrenton has done an expert job of photog-

raphy and Abe Meyer has contributed fitting incidental music, though I do think a better choice for the title music could have been found than the overdone *Liebestraume*.

UNIMPORTANCE OF BUDGET . . .

● **THE WAVE**; produced and directed by Paul Strand; script by Paul Strand and Velasquez Chavez; assistant director, Fred Zinneman; camera work by Strand; edited by Gunther von Fritsch; music by Sylvestre Revueltas.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

THERE has not been a picture that I have looked forward to as much as *The Wave*, and in no way was I disappointed. *The Wave* is one of the finest pictures I have ever seen, although it is the essence of simplicity in terms of plot, direction and background. The editorial debate which flared between the *New York Times* and Howard Dietz, assisted by Walter Wanger, might well have confined itself to this one picture. For if ever Frank Nugent's contention that budgets should have little or nothing to do with picture quality means anything, then this picture is eloquent proof of his assertion. To begin with, *The Wave* recounts the struggles of Vera Cruz Bay fishermen who are exploited by the boss of an organization which hires these people. This is a class struggle picture, so that those who suspected it in the very beginning can see it in print before they read further. Miro, one of the fishermen, attempts to organize the fishermen so that they cannot be exploited by the fish dealer. His efforts are rewarded with death at the hands of a truckling politician who tries to court the favor of the merchant.

Cinematic Art . . .

THE fact that *The Wave* has a social message probably spoils its chances for general release. I feel this is nothing short of tragedy. *The Wave* is such a cinematic masterpiece the fact that it calls upon the audience to do a little mental reflection should not altogether spoil it. The tragedy of reflection has been noted before and is a subject which Editor Beaton writes on from time to time. I feel that because the screen public has been so outrageously coddled with sugar and spice and all things visually and audibly nice, distributors are forced to pass a picture of this merit by.

Essence of Simplicity . . .

PAUL STRAND'S camera work has been called the most masterful ever executed. Judging from the beauty of this picture, with its clear, translucent shots of the ocean, of the fishermen, of the nets, of the hot, sunny Mexican climate, I should say that the camera work is of the highest order. The look upon the faces of the men when the dealer's agent hands them a few miserable coins for a day's work is one of the most poignant moments I have ever seen on the film. The scene where Miro, the martyr hero buries his child, throwing weary spadeful after spadeful upon the small white coffin, is dramatic and tense without striking a single false or off-key note. The

final decision of the fishermen to stick together, after Miro's sacrifice of his own life, are dramatic moments that cannot be forgotten lightly. Yet, turning back over these scenes and scores of others, what is there here that is abstruse, complicated, or vague? Nothing. The camera has simply watched a single day or two in the lives of some insignificant Mexican fishermen who had been wantonly exploited.

Universal Art . . .

A FRIEND who saw the picture with me commented on the lack of appeal which such a picture would have. His general comment was the same that any distributor might cite. "It's art, and therefore arty." In a way I think not. *The Wave* has universal appeal. Its structural simplicity is a common denominator which has appeal for the bedouin of Iraq as surely as for the Polynesian pearl diver. The fact that the dialogue, what little there was of it, was in Mexican dialect matters little. Even the fact that most of the English subtitles superimposed on the screen were oftentimes barely visible because of the constant presence of "white" scene background mattered less. Never before have I had it more clearly demonstrated to me that the screen is a visual art, and is therefore a universal art, not restricted by the confines of what is heard. What gibberish it all sounded like. But what a universal tongue those characters spoke with their eyes, their hands and their motionless lips.

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MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

Film Scores at the Bowl . . .

BORIS MORROS will conduct a concert at the Hollywood Bowl. It is to be one of the regular concert events and is to consist of film scores. Two years ago Paramount came to the rescue of the management. That is to say the studio put on a monster program—some thought it was a monstrosity—and the Southern California Symphony Association could write down from \$15,000 to \$20,000 gate receipts as net gain. At least that is the say-so. During the coming Bowl season (opening July 12, when Hageman conducts the *Valkyrie*, Jeritza in the title role), one or two studios will put on benefit nights for the symphony association. Paramount has already put itself down for one and Morros, as studio music chief, is doing the planning. I was not present at the 1936 Paramount Bowl program. It may have been "the best show in town," at least for a couple of hours. But from what I have been told, and notwithstanding Stokowski's august appearance via a special loudspeaker system, the event seems to have been entertaining, in fact, vastly entertaining, rather than eminently musical, as people expected it to be from a studio commanding such resources as are at the disposal of Paramount. It will be highly interesting to see what Paramount offers at the Bowl this year. The date is August 2.

Heigh-Ho . . . Good Fellows! . . .

IT WOULD strike me as a musically fair and lucrative idea if the Hollywood Bowl management were to devote an evening to the best in Hollywood film music generally. Paramount has been progressive, done some splendid things, but represents musically only a fraction of filmdom. What it has developed lately I cannot estimate, because Publicity Director Terry de Lapp has deemed me unworthy of hearing the more recent scores. It so happened that I criticized frankly certain musical portions of *The Big Broadcast of 1938* and have since then been denied critics' tickets for Paramount previews. So I do not know what has transpired of late at Paramount. In any case an inter-studio film concert should be attractive. Two years ago I had occasion to facilitate a WPA symphony program on which part of film scores by Max Steiner, Heinz Roemheld and others were played for the first time in concert form. Bernard Kaun directed. I am told Herbert Stothart's music for MGM's *Marie Antoinette* would easily yield a charming concert suite. Every major studio, and for that matter several independent or smaller producers, too, could muster composer and scores which should be represented on such a Hollywood film music concert. No doubt the various studios would share the expenses and thus aid the symphony association.

Handle with Care—Fragile . . .

WHETHER it is true or not that Sam Goldwyn's plans for a music film featuring Violinist Jascha Heifetz suffered another setback as a result of story trouble, the unorthodox producer now is thinking of a *Life of Hans Christian Anderson* in which the fairy tale sequences would be "enacted" by cartoons of the Disney type. The idea is not so far-fetched as it may seem. It is a case of surpassing illusion with something yet more illusionary. Disney and Mary Pickford thought of it in connection with an *Alice in Wonderland* picture that was never made by them. Films have been used in regular, three-dimensional stage productions of Darius Milhaud's opera *Christophe Columbus*. This music drama calls for many and quick shifts of locale. The chorus acts as a narrator. The Goldwynian Anderson-film-to-be should be entrusted to a composer of much imagination and theatre technic. With all due regard for the score and songs written by Frank Churchill for *Snow White*, they lack fairy tale imaginativeness. The songs are immensely popular because they patter along like the one about the big, bad wolf and the three little pigs. The Anderson film opens up also an interesting problem of tone color (general quality of the score) in those portions of the picture when the Danish story teller is seen and heard, in contrast with those sequences devoted to the doings and sayings of the creatures of his fancy.

Heard and Overheard . . .

ERNEST KRENEK, the Czech composer of *Jonny Spielt Auf* (the Jazz Opera), will shortly return to this country. *Jonny Spielt Auf* enjoyed hundreds of performances each winter several years in succession. This does not imply that Krenek is bound to this style of writing. He is a serious composer who has had much experience with music of every kind for the theatre, and already has made film music. An enterprising Hollywood producer should give him a chance. A chance, in this case, means a good story for which to write music. . . . As a result of the reception given his *Blockade* music, Werner Janssen has invitations to compose for two different studios. "If the film plays appeal to me, I will do the work. Otherwise Mrs. Janssen (the former Ann Harding), and I will leave a little earlier for Baltimore." Janssen is permanent conductor of the symphony orchestra there. By the way, Janssen was given only a week in which to compose the complicated music for *Blockade*. Producer Wanger then agreed to let him have ten days and the American composer completed the task in nine. This is quite an achievement considering calibre of music and orchestration, especially as Janssen rewrote the music for the eighth reel (showing the sinking of the decoy ship) no less than five times, owing to repeated wholesale changes in the

cutting room. In as much as this dramatically important reel contains five minutes and forty-three seconds of music, Janssen did enough duplicate work to provide almost half an hour of music, or enough for a medium length score.

Having a Wonderful Time? . . .

IN SELF-DEFENSE I listened only with one ear to the music for RKO's *Having a Wonderful Time*. I recall a bit of delightful woodwind music during a scene when the holiday makers are seen on horseback, but on the whole I think Roy Webb, musically in charge, must have had a hair-raising job. I was surprised to read Editor Beaton's high estimate of the picture. But then I may be wrong or not aware of my prejudices. Since seeing and hearing this picture I read in the *New York Times* that the picture, when sneak-previewed, was overwhelmingly turned down in a vote taken by way of audience cards. Morris Ryskind was called in and performed some blood-transfusion by injecting diverse sequences. What a joy that sort of thing must have been for Composer Webb and Music Director Dave Dreyer. It necessitated, of course, a lot of musical rearranging. To be sure, the music is not on a par with RKO's general record for doing light things handsomely. I have been asked how it occurred that one of the *Snow White* tunes was sung by a merry mob of campers in *Having a Wonderful Time*. I can only surmise that Disney welcomed the inferential advertising and loaned the tune also for the reason that there exists a booking or exploitation tie-up between his organization and RKO.

Pleasantly Conventional . . .

DR. WILLIAM AXT provided a pleasantly conventional score for MGM's *Woman Against Woman*. I am not using these words in a belittling sense. The score fits. Another man might have managed it differently, but the film play is essentially a conversation piece and Axt's music fits the talkative film as it suits the general milieu. Nothing subtle anywhere in the script. Hence I can imagine Axt scribbled his "there you are" in invisible ink at the end of his music manuscript. It rarely pays a composer to make silk purses out of sows' ears. The dance music of the title was aptly chosen, so also the sequence for "spring in Washington." But, dear me, the birdies! How they twittered. All a bit obvious because there was enough of that gushing in the Axt music which some poet told of, the biological fact that in spring the young man's fancy turns to whatever it turns to. There was more dance music, a bit of *Lohengrin*, all done to a turn. There were the hillbillies again. As one character in the script said: "With the cowboys making hillbilly music, is there one left on the ranch to milk the cows?" In short, the score did cause Dr. Axt no headaches. No need for that. It ran smoothly, affluent sounding in keeping with the affluent social background. The recording seemed very good despite the noise reproduction in projection room number one.

In the Same Manner . . .

SOMEWHAT in the manner of the Axt score is also the musical background for Warner's *My Bill*. In fact, no particular staff composer is mentioned on the Warner credit sheet. Only general music director Leo Forbstein is named as the responsible party. While Dr. Axt fancies Puccini to a by no means challengable degree, Director Forbstein evidently is fond of Frederick Delius. As it is, I am fond of the Italian as of the English composer. Forbstein used those Delisian echoes (from the Walk through the Paradise Garden with exquisite woodwind effects) tellingly indeed. *My Bill* is a tender story and tender music it was given. The long-drawn out use of piano practicing by a none too music-enthusiastic student by way of creating family atmosphere is unusual but a highly appropriate bit of "realism." It well applies to a mother's care which includes three big "B's": Beethoven, Brahms and the Butcher. It takes a practiced hand to bring them into harmony. All of which is part of the plot and Forbstein has good feeling for this family melodrama. It is not a distinguished score, but one which goes a long way to make untold numbers of people hear and enjoy music which would frighten them in a symphony concert. And a final cheer for Axt and Forbstein. They managed to give the song writers a rest.

CROSS COUNTRY SPECTATOR

By Robert Joseph

THIS is the first of a series of articles to be written by Mr. Joseph as a result of a cross-country trip by auto. He was sent by the Spectator to learn at first hand what exhibitors think of the product Hollywood sends them.

RECENTLY I had occasion to visit a number of exhibitors from one end of the country to the other, all of them more or less along Route 30, the Lincoln Highway, stretching from Salt Lake City into New York. The striking thing about the interviewings, numbering about twenty-five, was the almost unanimity of opinion on a series of questions which I propounded during the course of conversation. First assuring the gentlemen in Salt Lake City, Utah; Rock Springs, Wyoming; Cheyenne, Wyoming; Des Moines and Davenport, Iowa, and points eastward that I had absolutely nothing to sell, including subscriptions to the *Spectator*, I shot questions at them on everything from bank night to double features, by way of Neely-Pettengill and Brand's box-office poison. All of the gentlemen were quite frank and outspoken. Not more than three asked that I withhold names and places.

Movies and Side Shows . . .

THE exhibitors uniformly spoke out against the presence of side shows in the movie business. Specifically, radio publicity, which had a noticeable effect on box-office. One exhibitor complained that

he couldn't get his wife to go to his own theatre because she heard all the best pictures over the air. They all felt that publicizing a picture before it had been released in their territories was harmful. As one exhibitor brilliantly put it, "There is something about radio, unlike pictures, that destroys the illusion of distance and glamour. And stars are supposed to have both". He is speaking for his compatriots, or brother sufferers. Others pointed out that the biggest radio shows are on just those nights on which they play their biggest pictures. One of them complained that he was forced to play the biggest pictures on a one-day percentage deal, and many times he played his pictures the same time Louella Parsons or Lux or some other radio show was giving the show away free.

On Local Competition . . .

MR. BERTA of Rock Springs, Wyoming, managing the town's two theatres, seemed to have a legitimate complaint. "I do my best," he said, "to give the town nothing but the finest screen entertainment. I select, wherever I can, with judgment. Then when I go to the town leaders and ask that they cut short the stay of a traveling carnival I'm marked as selfish." At the time of visit Rock Springs was the scene of a circus unit passing through the state. If I remember correctly the stopover was to last a week. Manager Berta was honest in admitting the keenness of competition. The exhibitor has plenty to contend with, and it seems as if Hollywood and the Home Office were the last to know about it. Asked an exhibitor in Omaha, "Why don't they let us show them how to make box-office pictures? We ought to know something about it."

Exhibitors in Production . . .

TO ONE man I mentioned the name of Clifford Work, new studio manager for Universal. He has had a background as a showman. This exhibitor's answer was direct and a little startling. "I don't know Mr. Work, and he may be a fine fellow. But if I read my trade papers correctly he was the manager of a system of theatres in a key situation. What does a key city man know about showmanship? It isn't hard to fill a place like the Radio City Music Hall if you have a good picture. And if you have a poor one all the smart promotion in the world won't sell those necessary extra seats. It's fellows like us, with the 1000-seat theatres, who have to be six steps ahead of every other attraction in town that has showmanship. Work is a key city man, from what I understand, and that is a lot different from being out in the sticks, like I am."

Exhibitors on Hollywood . . .

NONE of the men to whom I spoke has ever been to Hollywood. One of them contemplated a visit this summer. He openly expressed fears about the coming trip. "I'd like," he said, "a chance to get through a couple of studios, but I guess I won't stand a chance. What kind of a break can an exhibitor expect in Hollywood?" The exhibitor is unfor-

tunately speaking the truth. His importance to the industry is obvious. But what a pushing around he takes in more ways than one!

LOCHINVAR COMES OUT WEST

By Mabel Keefer

AS I am about to embark on a treatise (or something) on love and romance on the screen, that title seems to be singularly appropriate, for, while Young Lochinvar may not have actually arrived, word has come out of the West that may be interpreted, we hope, as meaning that he is on his way. The word is that Hollywood, or at least part of it, is going to give us "melodramas and action pictures." We are not worrying about the action pictures but we are slightly perturbed about the melodramas—we are not quite sure what Hollywood's definition of melodrama may be. The dictionary defines it as: "any drama abounding in romantic sentiment and sensational situations, typically ending happily." Now, romantic sentiment is what we should have, but it must not degenerate into sentimentality. Sensational situations are all right if they are not cheaply sensational. And so, we wonder?

This Thing Called Love . . .

A FEW months ago the *Spectator* quoted *Film Weekly*, London, as saying that a reader had written a plea for films about *real* love, and we make the same plea in this country—that is, we of the small towns do, and I imagine that if the truth were known, so do the Broadwayites. Tawdry imitation, whether it be depicted in high-life, so-called, or among the lowly, will not satisfy us. A great man once said: "Love is the river of life in this world. Think not that ye know it who stand at the little tinkling rill, the first small fountain. Not until you have gone through the rocky gorges, and not lost the stream; not until you have gone through the meadow, and the stream has widened and deepened until fleets could ride on its bosom; not until beyond the meadow you have come to the unfath-

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omable ocean, and poured your treasures into its depths—not until then can you know what love is."

Emotional, Depth, Gayety, Humor . . .

TOO many of our screen love stories are tinkling rills. Surface gayety is all right if we can sense the ocean depths underneath—in fact we should have gayety and lots of it—but we must have the assurance that the unfathomable deep is really there. And humor-melodrama is so apt to lack humor, that is, real humor, which is a sane and confident attitude toward life; a sense of proportion.

Spectator's Excellent Suggestion . . .

SOME time ago Editor Beaton said producers were not making the most of old-men and old-women story possibilities, and he suggested a romance engineered by what he termed "the delightfully human and scheming parents of one of the parties to it," so I know he will be interested in the story of the middle-aged couple who, having two daughters happily married, were rather perturbed because their only son seemed to have a decided antipathy toward matrimony. They finally decided to take a hand in the matter and, both having a keen sense of humor, had a highly amusing time playing the part of Cupid in a subtle manner, and great satisfaction in their triumph in the end. Mr. Beaton made another fine story suggestion of an elderly man returning from somewhere with great wealth, finding a drab niece whom no one seemed to want to marry, and making her over into a glittering personality. There are certain actors and actresses who could go to town with a story like that.

Tioga Road Its Setting . . .

THERE also is the story of the elderly man whose niece was not drab—quite the contrary, and several men wanted to marry her. But when her uncle asked her how it happened that she had not married, she informed him that "Falling in love is a foolish business! I am not having any!" Shortly after, while on a camping trip in the Tioga Road section of the Sierras, the uncle met a forest ranger to whom he took a great liking. The ranger wrote music for his own entertainment and, having a great love for the woods, sometimes tried to put some of the forest sounds into his music. In the course of a conversation the ranger, to the interested amusement of the uncle, said exactly the same thing; "Falling in love is a foolish business! I am not having any!" Deciding that such a coincidence should not be ignored, the uncle invited his niece to go camping with him and when, after meeting the ranger, she told her uncle that he seemed to be an interesting man, he replied, "You and Dave should be great friends. He thinks just as you do—that falling in love is a foolish business. He's not having any." Then, when the ranger told him that his niece was an unusual girl, he said, "You and Ann should be great friends. She thinks just as you do—that falling in love is a foolish business. She's not having any." After that, impishly, he sat back to watch

the fun, occasionally putting in an oar to make the course of true love run around in circles. There are various middle-aged actors one can imagine in a part like that.

Learning to Walk and Talk . . .

SOME weeks ago I took time out to watch a High School band go by on its way to join the Memorial Day parade. The band was not playing—just the beat of the drums—but what a pleasing sight it was to watch those lads (and one lass) walking along with rhythmic, swinging steps. The screen is doing much to help us to learn to talk—to cultivate good speaking voices—(What was that? Sounded like someone saying, "The executives . . . do not envision themselves as teachers . . .") and it might do much to help us to learn to walk. There is the story of the young man who, like any normal person, had a great liking for drums and marching. Noting that the average citizen in a parade was something to weep over, he set about training boys to walk to the beat of drums, and soon the movement spread to all parts of the country, with the result that youth acquired an entirely new attitude toward life; there was less crime; drums and trumpets and the tramp of marching feet became associated with the spirit of fun and goodwill, and people learned to walk. It would be fine to see a motion picture depicting something like that. Too bad Nelson Eddy is all tied up with prospective light opera pictures. It is said that he is an expert drummer, and what a fine leader of pictured American youth he would make in a "long short subject" of this nature.

We Want Masterpieces, Too . . .

WHILE the suggested type of screen story is what we need for a steady diet, we, of course, want an occasional "masterpiece"—or maybe I should say we want one quite frequently. Pictures like *Zola*, *Captains Courageous*; historical pictures like *Wells Fargo*, and many other fine presentations. As for the spectacular type of picture—just once in a while is enough. We should like to feel that these prospective "melodramas" would mean authentic scenic backgrounds as far as possible. There is something about an artificial background that seeps into one's consciousness, and, on occasion, may become the insect in the emollient. I find that there is a surprising amount of favorable reaction to beautiful scenery, in the average motion picture audience, and that includes all types and classes.

Sacred? Well, a Little . . .

AS A matter of fact, the film industry should not blame us for being a bit apprehensive as to what may be handed to us as melodrama, when, in the past, they have shown so little conception of what a great many of us wanted in the way of screen entertainment. They have, to a certain extent, made a play for a certain type of picture patron and practically told the rest of us to take it or leave it. But, if we are apprehensive, we also are hopeful, and await the coming of something of which *Young Lochinvar* may be symbolic.

A director who wishes to remain anonymous contributes the price of this page to the support of a paper under obligation to which are all those who have at heart the best interests of the motion picture business in general and its creative workers in particular.

Hollywood **SPECTATOR**

10 CENTS

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—July 9, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 12

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Mabel Keefer

Robert Joseph

Bert Harlen

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Temporarily in the Easy Chair

By Robert Joseph

AS I SEE THE SPECTATOR . . .

THE *Spectator* is a source of constant amazement to me, for when I open the pages of an issue just off the press I never know what to expect. Editor Beaton goes from wonder to wonder, always championing and fighting for the cause which others dare not touch. This is no hymn of praise to an employer, but a rather wide-eyed, open-mouthed confession of faith. The most astounding thing of all is that the *Spectator* has never wavered and has never made a turn-about. You can be sure that external pressure is great; the mark of delineation has yet to be changed for an easier way. When I am assigned to picture previews there are no qualifying statements as to the kind of review that is to be expected. I take that back. Often, in the case of young directors or young producers, working on their first or second picture, I am asked to go lightly, and to remember that the director or produce in question is just a beginner. I do not think that even this is compromise. The *Spectator* attempts to build and not destroy; and devastating wisecracks gain nothing. Working for Mr. Beaton is an education. The tendency, given free space to fill, is to blow off all the pent-up steam of the past several months. I did that at first. But I have learned a lot since those first days. Not only in the conduct of editorial matter; but on the fundamentals of film making and film art. I do not know much, yet. I still have a lot to learn. But there is no one I would prefer to learn it from than Editor Beaton.

* * *

NUGENT vs. DIETZ . . .

SEVERAL weeks ago Frank Nugent, of the *New York Times*, and Howard Dietz, head of MGM publicity, crossed swords in an editorial battle. Mr. Nugent expressed a preference for foreign-made pictures. The publicist attempted to explain away the predilection by saying that what fascinated the film critic was the very foreignness of the picture rather than any inherent cinematic values. In any case we cannot question the sincerity of either participant in the foray. Frank Nugent's observation that foreign pictures cost a fraction as much and entertain many times more than native product, is, after all, the expression of one man's opinion. Personally, I respect his opinion. It seems that the motion picture critic, set apart from the pressure of advertising worries, can express an honest opinion. Nor can the sincerity of Dietz be questioned.

One Point Overlooked . . .

THERE is one feature of the entire discussion that the two gentlemen failed to notice. Critic Nugent covers many pictures. Some of these are French, German, Italian, Swedish, English, Russian. I do not know Frank Nugent personally, but it is my guess he knows no more than two or three of these languages. The question then arises, how important

is it to know the language to enjoy a foreign-tongue picture? I have seen *Mayerling* and *Peter the First*, one in French the other Russian, without understanding but a trace of the first language and none of the second. The important thing to *understand* in enjoying any picture, is what the eyes see, and not essentially what the ears hear. Nugent's inability to understand, say, Swedish, had nothing to do with his enjoyment of a picture in that tongue.

Using the Camera . . .

THE conclusions are obvious. The important part of a film is the action. That is so fundamental, so elemental that I feel it is almost an insult to the readers of the *Spectator* to point it out. European technicians know how to use a camera. And European directors evidently know how to hush their dialogue writers and keep screen noises down to an essential minimum. It is this very sound minimum which forced Frank Nugent to express a preference for foreign-made pictures.

More Anent the Same . . .

AT A later date Walter Wanger entered the lists, somewhere nearer the side of Howard Dietz, and pointed out that the nature of the world market for American-made pictures brought production problems into existence that the French producer did not have to consider. He pointed out that the field for American-made pictures demands star names; French-made pictures, as an example, do not. What Walter Wanger evidently fails to see is that the screen reflects a universal art. He quotes Shakespeare who said, "the play's the things," but then calls the sentiment balderdash when it comes to the final box-office tally.

A Universal Art . . .

HATE, fear, vanity, love—any of the emotions of man as portrayed on the screen are registered in the same spirit by an Irishman or a Javanese. Paul Muni is no more divinely gifted to portray anger before the camera than the meanest head-hunter in Australia. What makes motion pictures popular? Their very universality, their democracy of emotion. It is true that every gum-chewing stenog dreams herself Joan Crawford or Carole Lombard. Why then the opinion that American-made pictures need an expensive little something that other foreign films do not need?

Who Is the Public? . . .

WALTER WANGER writes, "I feel it is highly unfair to draw a comparison between two national products intended for decidedly different minds and markets and made under very different conditions." With the last clause of his remarks we have no quarrel. There can be no question that the conditions are very different. He cites as an example the

fact that the original version of *Pepe le Moko* cost but \$68,000 to make. His version will cost, as he himself admits, fifteen times as much. This is a sad confession, indeed. But it is with the first portion of his remarks that I must differ. The fact that RKO contracted for *Mayerling* on its theatre circuit is ample indication of that company's opinion of the potential box-office draw of the feature. As Gilbert Seldes pointed out in his recent book, *The Movies Come From America*, people go to the pictures to see motion, and to feel emotion. Hearing is incidental. The public is the same, a constant, and I don't think geographical boundaries have much to do with taste when it comes to cinematic fare.

* * *

JAPAN SELECTS TEN BEST . . .

THE Japanese film trade journal, *Cinema Jumbo*, recently held a survey on the ten best box-office draws for the past year, and the ten best pictures from an artistic standpoint. Leading film critics and newspaper correspondents were asked to submit entries. The first category included: *Charge of the Light Brigade*, *The Good Earth*, *Michael Strogoff*, *Lost Horizon*, *The Plainsman*, *Swing High*, *Swing Low*, *Shall We Dance*, *Souls At Sea*, the French pictures *Les Bas-Fonds*, *Port Arthur*. On the aesthetic side the critics selected these: *La Kermesse Heroine*, *La Belle Equipage*, *Les Bas-Fonds*, *Dodsworth*, *Make Way For Tomorrow*, *Club des Femmes*, *The Good Earth*, *The Golem*, *You Only Live Once* and *Fury*. The American film companies are flattered to have their pictures thus selected as box-office and artistic champions. Somehow or other they would be even more flattered if the Japanese government would lift the embargo on foreign payments.

* * *

IS IT TRUE ABOUT KATE? . . .

YES, it is true what they say about Katharine Hepburn. She kicked about the kind of roles they were giving her, and she broke her contract. If that is the truth they wanted to hear, then they need question no further. Her comeback, if indeed it can be termed such, in *Holiday* reestablishes her as an actress of the first magnitude. No actor or actress, except in isolated instances, ever loses dramatic skill. After years of acting on the stage and before the camera an actor must improve, unless he or she was hopeless in the first case. What matters, then, is not the personality or the ability of the actor in question, but the kind of material offered to display his abilities. The saying—a bromide—around Hollywood is that an actor is as good as his material. Nothing can be nearer the truth.

Forgotten In Hollywood . . .

IN A past issue of the *Spectator* one of the editors pointed out that there were two ways in which to murder box-office draw. One of these, as exemplified by Walter Brennan, was role starvation; the other,

as depicted in the case of Dorothy Lamour, was role satiety. Hollywood makes many mistakes, but none of them as serious as failing to cash in on a good thing. Janet Gaynor's performance in *A Star Is Born* was so outstanding that she was nominated for a second Academy Award. It took almost a year to make capital of her renewed popularity. Walter Brennan, of course, is another star. He has done literally nothing since *Come and Get It*, although his ability and talents have remained constant.

Exhibitors' Point of View . . .

THE exhibitors' tirade against what they termed "box-office poison" is understandable. Out in the field they attack the largest target, which is the stars themselves. But here in Hollywood we know the truth. We know that the exhibitors are aiming in the right direction, but hitting the wrong mark. Executive brains are on a holiday, it seems, and have been for a long time. A return to the fundamentals, as the *Spectator* has repeatedly intoned, is the only hope for a general revival of public interest in pictures.

* * *

FILM GUIDE STUDY AID . . .

RARELY has anything as intelligent as Harold Turney's *Film Guide* passed this desk. Mr. Turney is Chairman of the Department of Drama, Los Angeles Junior College, and editor of *Film Guide*, a class study help of unusual excellence. In addition to a study outline, dealing with the structure of the *Robin Hood* narrative, the subject of his first issue, there is also information on other phases of that picture. Color, music, staging, direction and general subheads. There is also a generous section dealing with the more technical aspects of filming this particular picture. It is to be noted that Harold Turney's *Film Guide* deals with pictures in a practical manner. Some of the other study guides which come to this desk stress what might be termed the "arty" aspects of picture making.

* * *

BACK TO NATURE . . .

WITH the exception of RKO, Universal and Columbia, every major studio is preparing a series of gargantuan outdoor epics. MGM has several lined up for its leading contract players, as have Paramount, Warners and Twentieth. It is interesting to note that studios are frantically grooming lounge lizards for roles as saddle-sitters. There is a complete regeneration going on in many cases to he-manize various male stars. The industry is slowly remembering that it was lowly westerns, outdoor epics shot in Griffith Park, that gave it its original impetus. As Gilbert Seldes recently pointed out, the general public buys theatre tickets to see *motion* pictures. Out in the open where men, horses and the camera can roam without the restrictions of a studio set, the business can get back to filming *action*.

MIRANDA MEANDERINGS . . .

By Tom Miranda

BEFORE Welford left yesterday he suggested that I write some "Meanderings" for him; said I could write anything I liked. "Send it straight to the printer, as I won't be here to read it first." If he read it, I know he would not print it. . . . Once we were spending a summer's day with Mr. and Mrs. Spectator. . . . A quiet Sunday, watching the pups and the kittens playing on the lawn. . . . Thank goodness we would be alone . . . we could talk over that story. . . . We lit our pipes and I began. . . . A large Packard stopped at the gate . . . a well-known movie star ran into the garden . . . her arms laden with gorgeous flowers . . . she kissed Mrs. Spectator. . . . "I was passing, and I thought you'd like them. . . . Don't forget, I'm expecting you both to dinner Friday." . . . I relit my pipe and started at the beginning . . . a French horn blew loudly . . . Mr. Spectator looked up . . . a director and his kiddies stopped to say hello. You would have thought he was their favorite uncle . . . climbing over him, demanding a story . . . and so the afternoon passed . . . they came from Hollywood, Beverly Hills, the Valley and one from the beach, to pay their respects. . . . I shoved the manuscript behind me. . . . Mrs. Spectator's delicious dinner was on the table . . . and what a feast! . . . In the gathering twilight we sat smoking, listening to the mother birds cooing their babies to sleep . . . we talked of war, of peace, literature, world affairs . . . or rather Mr. Spectator talked, I listened . . . pleased and surprised at the great fund of knowledge he possesses . . . he talks with easy surety . . . equity . . . without malice . . . revealing a great love for all humanity . . . a generosity of soul . . . only once did I disagree. . . . "There is an end to all things," I said. . . . "How then can you say space is endless?" "If not," he replied, "tell me this . . . what is beyond the end of space?" I gave up. Putting on our hats, we heard the toot of an auto horn and a cheery: "Oh, Welford!" . . . We followed Mr. and Mrs. Spectator, pups and kittens, to the front gate. . . . Another movie star . . . one of the most important in the industry. . . . She ran to the gate. . . . "You didn't like my last picture, Welford. Why?" . . . "You were miscast," said Mr. Spectator. . . . She patted his cheek gently. "Old Grumpy. . . . But you are right. . . . I told them so from the start . . . didn't want to do the story. . . . I'm glad there is one critic with enough courage to speak the truth." . . . She adopted one of the kittens. . . . "I'm off to Palm Springs until next Friday. . . . But remember, I'm expecting you and Lou Sunday evening." . . . So the day ended. . . . Driving home-ward Mrs. Tom said: "It's been a perfect day, I think. . . . I like Lou and Welford so much . . . they're real folks. . . . Always loyal . . . that's why they always get on . . . are always happy." . . . And there came to my mind those splendid lines of Wiltse: "What is more soul-satisfying than an abundant life earned by work? What knowledge is more basic than knowledge wrung from experience? *What char-*

acter is finer than that developed humbly out of disaster and triumph in active every-day life?" . . . To know the Spectator family through their years is to think of it in such terms. . . . It wears well.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

WANGER CHALKS UP ANOTHER . . .

● **ALGIERS;** United Artists release of a Walter Wanger production; stars Charles Boyer; features Sigrid Gurie, Hedy Lamarr, Alan Hale, Joseph Calleia, Gene Lockhart, Mme. Koshetz and Johnny Downs; director, John Cromwell; from the novel, "Pepe le Moko;" screen play, John Howard Lawson; added dialogue, James M. Cain; photography, James Wong Howe; technical advisor, Jamiel Hasson; assistant director, Horace Hough; art director, Alexander Toluboff; assistant art director, Wade Rubottom; music, Vincent Scotto and Mohammed Igorbouchen; lyrics, Ann Ronell. Cast: Stanley Fields, Joan Woodbury, Claudia Dell, Robert Greig, Charles D. Brown, Ben Hall, Armand Kaliz, Walter Kingsford, Paul Harvey, Bert Roach, Luana Walters and Leonid Kinsky.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

A FASCINATING story, told with rare skill. The fiction material is new, the treatment unique, studded with touches of sheer cinematic brilliance. Its locale is The Casbah, a section of Algiers internationally famous as a refuge for criminals, a strange, exotic world in itself overlooking the Mediterranean. Here a labyrinth of narrow, meandering streets, mysterious bypaths, secret passages and the like render the police powerless to apprehend any criminal once he has reached its confines. Officers can enter the quarter and even converse with a wanted criminal if he is amicably disposed, but they attempt an arrest at the peril of their lives. The present story tells of the long and patient endeavor to lure the criminal lord of the settlement, a notorious jewel thief, Pepe Le Moko, from his fortress. This plot is engineered by a crafty inspector, who, oddly enough, is in daily contact and on friendly terms with Pepe, despite that the thief is quite aware of his objective. In fact, they share a certain admiration for each other. From a surface aspect, there is not a little theatricality in film, but the vividness and depth of the characterizations, the craftsmanship of the plot, the rich atmosphere and sustained mood beguile one into forgetting the imprint of Hollywood on some of the natives and some of the sets, and leave him absorbed in the somber, suspense-laden tale that is being told.

Camera a Living Thing . . .

JOHAN CROMWELL makes of the camera an alive, all-seeing medium, rather than a mere reproductive device. Especially effective is the grim scene in which the terrified informer, played by Gene Lockhart, meets his death at the hands of the gang. Here the camera, as though eyeing him with detached disdain, makes a completely semicircular movement about him. Then the fellow, faced with the gun of the man he had betrayed, stumbles in terror against an old player piano, and the music box brays a blatant and ironic death knell. A burst of applause from the preview audience followed upon this scene. James

Wong Howe, really a creative artist with the camera, undoubtedly deserves credit along with the director for the dramatic potency of many of the scenes. The grouping of the characters and numerous other good points of composition and movement evidently reflect his skill. Particularly dramatic was a foreboding scene between the informer and Pepe, the first part of which was done with the room in almost total darkness, the characters silhouetted in bold, black relief against a flood of light from the door.

Charles Boyer Impressive . . .

APPEARING as Pepe is Charles Boyer, who has approached the part with his customary thorough study, and realizes splendidly the many moods and impulses of the young thief. He presents an engrossing psychological expose of the man who can outwit the police but cannot conquer himself, and whose disgust with the sordidness and monotony of his environment and his love for a girl on the outside drive him to seek his escape. Prominently cast with the star are two strikingly individual young women, Sigrid Gurie and Hedy Lamarr. As the spurned native sweetheart of Pepe, Miss Gurie brings inner qualities to the role which make her performance transcend the theatricality which almost inevitably accompanies the presentment of a native girl on the screen, because of the camera's eye for detail. Both the temper and the sorrow with which she invests the part, however, most certainly do ring true. She is extremely effective, and this portrayal should mean a large forward stride in her screen career. Miss Lamarr also registers strongly in quite a different kind of part. Under the creative direction of Cromwell, she makes a glamorous, sensuous, and yet pathetic creature of the girl who is throwing away her life on a wealthy old fool. The beauty of the actress has inspired Howe to film a series of ethereal, Dresden-china shots, the likes of which have not been excelled for lusciousness even by the Dietrich studies. Probably, in fact, he has gone overboard in this direction at time or two, as their velvety texture contrasts slightly with the somewhat sharper treatment accorded accompanying shots.

Many Unusual Performances Given . . .

DOING perhaps the most outstanding work of his screen career, is Gene Lockhart as the doomed informer. His unctuous and cowardly little fellow is a well thought out characterization and the emotional force of his death scene has been referred to. Joseph Calleia gives a distinguished performance in the important role of the patient police inspector, certainly a many faceted part. Too many others in the cast do unusual work for individual mention to be feasible. One to be cited, though, is Johnny Downs, who plays his first heavy part, as the youngest member of Pepe's band, and with a high degree of success. Mme. Nina Koshetz, the opera star, makes what I believe to be her debut in pictures. She is a good type, though her range of dramatic expression is not yet very broad, at least in cinematic terms. Why wasn't she permitted to sing just a bit?

Reality Dispels Illusion . . .

THE only detraction in the picture—in fact, a definitely marring feature—is the inclusion at the first of the picture, as well as at two or more points farther on, of what appear to be newsreel shots of the Casbah section, though the list of credits asserts the scenes were especially filmed. At any rate, most of them do not match in either photographic quality or in spirit with the rest of the picture. There is a wide gulf between theatrical illusion and reality. Nor are the scenes necessary. The sets of Alexander Toluboff and Wade Rubottom, together with expository dialogue, establish the locale and mood of the story quite satisfactorily. Two or three of these shots—those, as I recall, showing scenery and little or nothing of the natives—harmonize well enough and their descriptive value may warrant their usage, but the inclusion of the others is completely and incontrovertibly a mistake, and I hope they are removed. Mention should be made of the highly atmospheric background music, provided, I assume by the credits, by Vincent Scotto and Mohammed Igorbouchen. Paul Neal, sound engineer, also rates mention, because of the expert way in which he has caught the low tones in which Cromwell has the characters speak much of the time, as well as for the interesting sound effect he evidently worked out to illustrate Boyer's growing mental confusion and desperation in one scene. The well constructed play was done by John Howard Lawson, taken from a French novel, additional dialogue being contributed by James M. Cain.

WHO OF US IS CRAZY? . . .

● **THE AMAZING DR. CLITTERHOUSE;** Warners release of First National picture; produced and directed by Anatole Litvak; executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Robert Lord; screen play, John Wexley and John Huston; from the play by Barre Lyndon photography by Tony Gaudio; assistant director, Jack Sullivan; art director, Carl Jules Weyl; film editor, Warren Low; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein. Cast: Edward G. Robinson, Claire Trevor, Humphrey Bogart, Allen Jenkins, Donald Crisp, Gale Page, Henry O'Neill, John Litel, Thurston Hall, Maxie Rosenbloom, Bert Hanlon, Curt Bois, Ward Bond, Vladimir Sokoloff, Billy Wayne, Robert Homans, Irving Bacon.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

IT HAS been my principle in reviewing pictures never to divulge any information about the ending of a story which might lessen its effectiveness when readers see the film. In the present case, however, I do not see how I can discuss the picture at all without revealing certain circumstances in the story which might—and I stress the word "might"—take away some of the surprise and irony from the ending. Actually, I think most spectators will have begun to suspect that the amazing Dr. Clitterhouse is not altogether right in the mental region before the drama has unreeled itself very far. But if anyone feels I have ruined the show for him he is privileged to clip the review and return it with skull and crossbones and a dire threat on it, and have his vengeance from the trepidation and insomnia I shall suffer—I'm such

a fraidy cat. Or does this sound at all funny? 'Anyway, the charm of *The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse* lies in its thesis, which is this: "What is it to be crazy?" or "Who of us is sane, after all?" Dr. Clitterhouse, a reputable and socially prominent physician, becomes so absorbed in the scientific study of criminals he is making, that he not only launches on a career of burglary so that he can observe his own physiological and psychological reactions, but eventually takes up with a band of crooks so that he can study theirs. His undoing comes about when, one of the culprits having gotten possession of his medical notes and threatening him with exposure, the doctor decides to observe the reactions of a murderer. More intent on observation than caution, he leaves a trail this time. When apprehended, the doctor is perplexed that everyone regards him as insane when he regards himself as perfectly rational and a servant of medical science.

Robinson Gives Dramatic Portrayal . . .

THE part does well by Edward G. Robinson and he does well by the part. He has plainly given extensive analysis to the character, and the doctor emerges as a fascinating figure of many mental and emotional nuances. The actor appears to have conceived the doctor as a monomaniac, incidentally. The picture itself is good melodrama, having suspense in the action, as well as the unique thesis, to recommend it. Anatole Litvak has given the piece imaginative direction; he has a keen eye for characterization, and he has handled the big situations with fine dramatic force. An admirable attribute of his direction is his frequent use of sustained shots, seldom breaking the continuity of a scene by the interpolation of close-ups or short shots. At the opening of the picture the camera quietly leaves a party of guests, goes out through the window, climbs the wall, and enters a bedroom upstairs. When the action there is completed, the camera returns by the same way. Cameraman Tony Gaudio again demonstrates his skilled technic in this and other scenes. And kudos to Warren Low, editor, for his apparent understanding with both director and cameraman.

Appended Ending Questionable . . .

EVERYTHING considered, John Wexley and John Huston have improved upon the stage play of Barre Lyndon in bringing it to the screen. It has faster and more absorbing action, and numerous humorous and ironical touches have been added. The value of certain changes and additions, however, can be questioned, especially the appended ending. Much of the charm of the stage piece lay in the quizzical and ambiguous note on which it ended, when everyone in the doctor's office considerably and sympathetically assured him that he was batty, and the doctor went off with the police partly amused, partly perplexed. The addition of a raucous court room scene and a jury verdict lends hullabaloo but does not really emphasize the thesis, being merely an irrelevant twist, and is probably anticlimactic. The subtle ending of the original material would prob-

ably have been more effective, built more carefully than it is at present, of course. Making the girl in the yarn the leader of the band rather than only one of its members doubtless strengthens the part some for Claire Trevor, but not sufficiently to give her a great deal to do, while it results in an incongruity or two, since the chief bad boy of the lot pushes her around whenever he feels like it. However, Miss Trevor brings a good deal of glamor and her usual expert trouping to the part. As "Rocks", the tough fellow, Humphrey Bogart turns in an excellent performance, characterizing deftly and giving a dynamic final scene. The always outstanding Donald Crisp, Allen Jenkins, Gale Page, and, oddly enough, Maxie Rosenbloom are others of the capable cast who make important contributions to the action. The art work of Carl Jules Weyl is first-rate.

SHIRLEY SHINES AGAIN . . .

● **LITTLE MISS BROADWAY**; Twentieth Century-Fox release; Darryl F. Zanuck in charge of production; stars Shirley Temple; director, Irving Cummings; associate producer, David Hempstead; original screen play by Harry Tugend and Jack Yellen; features George Murphy, Jimmy Durante, Phyllis Brooks, Edna May Oliver, George Barbier, Edward Ellis, Jane Darwell, El Brendel, Donald Meek, Patricia Wilder and Claude Gillingwater, Sr; music and lyrics, Walter Bullock and Harold Spina; dance staging, Nick Castle and Geneva Sawyer; photography, Arthur Miller; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Hans Peters; film editor, Walter Thompson; musical director, Louis Silvers. Supporting cast: George and Olive Brasno, Charles Williams, Charles Coleman, Russell Hicks, Brian Sisters, Brewster Twins, Claire DuBrey, Robert Gleckler, C. Montague Shaw, Frank Dae, Clarence Hummel Wilson, Eddie Collins, Syd Saylor, Jerry Colonna, Heinie Conklin and Ben Waldon.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

ONE of the best of the Shirley Temple pictures. Twentieth Century's wonder child is afforded excellent opportunities by the story material, and she realizes them to the fullest under Irving Cummings' capable direction. The young miss gives a captivating performance, filling the screen with a winning warmth of personality in her humorous scenes, and some really poignant grief when reflecting disappointment. *Little Miss Broadway* is a bright, airy, tuneful musical, a form of light entertainment which should please almost anyone. The original screen play by Harry Tugend and Jack Yellen is a simple tale with respect to characterization and plot development, but its very lack of subtlety and sophistication, its *Jack and the Bean Stalk* flavor, results in a refreshing quality. Moreover, the locale is colorful, the situations good, and it provides occasions for bringing in the musical numbers in an easy, natural way.

Music Is Swingy, Engaging . . .

MUCH of the action is laid in a theatrical hotel, the proprietor of which has adopted the child from an orphanage, her father having been an esteemed friend of his. The menace is a wealthy but acrid old woman living next door, who owns the hotel and threatens to take it over, throwing many impecunious vaudeville artists into the street, because she re-

gards the occupants as riff-raff and because her nephew has fallen in love with the proprietor's daughter. How little Shirley saves the day and also puts many performers back to work forms an interest-sustaining and musically lilting tale. Some half a dozen musical numbers by Walter Bullock and Harold Spina are admirably suited to the spirit of the story and the talents of the performers, swingy and engaging songs. And Louise Silvers has handled the orchestration and direction in an unusually neat and punchy way.

Star and Lead Man Team Well . . .

GEORGE MURPHY is a happy choice for the leading man. He makes the best kind of team-mate for the young actress, entering thoroughly into the spirit of her whims and caprices. Murphy is a top-notch dancer too, and his work greatly complements that of the younger performer in their routines. Their song and dance number *We Should Be Together* is one of the best musical numbers I have seen in some time. Nick Castle and Geneva Sawyer can take a bow for their staging of the terpsichorean portions. Outstanding among the supporting cast is Jimmy Durante, shaking his "snuzzle" and "mortifyin'" himself through several episodes of good fun. He gets off some nifties of wit in his present role too. Says he to the girl who has spurned him, "From now on when you talk to me start the conversation with 'Goodbye'!" Phyllis Brooks has not a great deal to do, but is pleasant about it, and Edna Mae Oliver customarily plays to the hilt the acrid spinster. Donald Meek is capital as her hen-pecked but raring-to-go brother, and others seen to advantage are George Barbier, Edward Ellis, Jane Darwell and El Brendel. The production is handsomely staged, Bernard Herzbrun and Hans Peters having provided sets as lavish as any to come from their drawing boards. Photography and editing are first-rate. Afterthought: What was the newspaper bearing "Fanchon" in large letters doing in an ash can? I fear this will be generally interpreted as an unkindness.

PLEASANT FILMIC PASTRY . . .

● **ALWAYS GOODBYE**; 20th-Fox production and release; Darryl F. Zanuck in charge of production; associate producer, Raymond Griffith; co-stars Barbara Stanwyck and Herbert Marshall; directed by Sidney Lanfield; features Ian Hunter, Cesar Romero, Lynn Bari, Binnie Barnes, John Russell; screen play by Kathryn Scola and Edith Skouras; based on story by Gilbert Emery and Douglas Doty; photographed by Robert Planck; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Hans Peters; film editor, Robert Simpson; costumes, Royer; musical direction, Louis Silvers. Supporting cast: Mary Forbes, Albert Conti, Marcelle Corday, Franklyn Pangborn, George Davis, Ben Welden, Eddy Conrad.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

AS A picture designed for popular appeal, *Always Goodbye* is an altogether successful undertaking. It has all the elements needed for causing sentimentally inclined matinee ladies to dampen pretty handkerchiefs, and ribbon clerks to accelerate the rolling of their multi-colored bolts at the closing hour in anticipation of the rich vicarious living awaiting them.

There is the Cinderella element, which pictures the heroine rising from a miserable state on a wharf, where she is contemplating suicide, to the height of success as a modiste, a state permitting her to move among simply oodles of elegant gowns and live in a generally gilded world. And then there is the mother-love element, in which the successful young woman plots to protect the welfare of her fatherless little one, whom she had allowed to be adopted by an affluent family during earlier moments of despondency. Too, there is the spectacle—always gratifying to females, I am told—of the profoundly and eternally devoted gentleman friend who states, when at last he gives her up so that she can be with her boy, that just to hear the admission of love from her lips gives him enough happiness to last a lifetime. I found the picture a very pleasant piece of filmic pastry; I enjoyed the trip to Paris, and found myself wishing I could be half as witty as the characters are in their witty moments, and was greatly heartened by the extravagance of dress and environment that came everybody's way. But if I was never sincerely and deeply moved—well, perhaps it is because I was never a mother.

Barbara Seen to Advantage . . .

CERTAINLY as a vehicle the yarn serves Barbara Stanwyck well. Not only do the gowns set her off attractively, but the role affords her scenes of wide emotional range. Her episodes with little John Russell, really a remarkable youngster, have a great deal of warmth and spontaneity, and the whimsical tomfoolery in which she engages with Herbert Marshall sparkles and crackles agreeably. In her most intense scenes, however, Miss Stanwyck does not quite ascend to the emotional height demanded by them. Everything considered, though, she fares well in this role and under the capable directorial hand of Sidney Lanfield. Co-starring Herbert Marshall, a finished actor whom it is always a pleasure to see, comes off well in this piece too, though his role is not a lengthy one. Shining with the best of them is little John Russell, a very vital and precocious child, who seems to have the same intuitive grasp of the requirements of a part which characterized the work of Shirley Temple several years ago. Ian Hunter has in the role of the foster father the sympathetic type of part in which he has distinguished himself in the past, and he here gives a fine performance. Cesar Romero found favor with the audience in the silly role of a gushing and perpetually ardent count, though I think he could have brought more conviction to the role and a smoother texture to the picture if he had toned it all down a little. Lynn Bari is pleasant in her lighter scenes, might have been more subtle in her more disagreeable ones. The suave and brittle Binnie Barnes is again effective.

Public Gets Second Helping . . .

THE only major fault I have to find with *Always Goodbye* is that it also served Ann Harding several seasons ago. The new screen play, by Kathryn Scola and Edith Skouras, has been touched up a bit,

but essentially the original story by Gilbert Emery and Douglas Doty is the same. Personally, I resent a reminiscent undertone in a picture, and I think most spectators feel the same way. And I believe the all too frequent rehash of earlier pictures of late represents bad showmanship; the public must surely get the impression that the motion picture industry is creatively reaching the end of its rope. Moreover, I have never believed there was any paucity of story material in Hollywood. The remaking of famous or epic stories is thoroughly justified, because of the strength of the material and because the public in such cases knows what it is getting. But the rehash of run-of-the-mill fiction is both unnecessary and unwise. From a production standpoint, of course, the film has been done on a big scale. The sets of Bernard Herzbrun and Hans Peters, the decorations by Thomas Little, and the costumes of Royer are all, as I have intimated, very la-de-da. And Robert Planck has done them full justice with his photography. The film is well edited by Robert Simpson.

ALL OVER SHELLEY AND KEATS . . .

● **FAST COMPANY**; Metro picture and release; directed by Edward Buzzell; produced by Frederick Stephani; screen play by Marco Page and Harold Tarshis; from the book by Marco Page; musical score, Dr. William Axt; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associate art directors, Gabriel Scognamiglio and Edwin B. Willis; photography, Clyde De Vinna; film editor, Frederick Y. Smith. Cast: Melvyn Douglas, Florence Rice, Claire Dodd, Shepperd Strudwick, Louis Calhern, Nat Pendleton, Douglas Dumbrille, Mary Howard, George Zucco, Minor Watson, Donald Douglas, Dwight Frye, Thurston Hall, Horace MacMahon.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

VERY jolly and tonic. Though basically the yarn is just another *whodunit*, the dizzy nonsense engaged in by Melvyn Douglas and Florence Rice, and the sportive, tongue-in-cheek attitude Director Edward Buzzell has assumed toward the whole affair, lift the piece to a sprightly and amusing comedy-melodrama. Really choice humor is the outcome of the hero's being shot at on the street—he gets it, of all places, in the rump, and must go about thereafter carrying his “doughnut,” a circular rubber pad which enables him to sit down. The screen play of Marco Page and Harold Tarshis, taken from the former's novel, is distinguished by some of the wittiest dialogue we have heard in many a moon. Of course, the quips are too utterly clever for mere mortals, but the players make them seem plausible, and, besides, one is inclined to view them as Turner did his flamboyant sunset—wouldn't it be nice if people *could* talk that way?

Business Infected with Knaves . . .

FURTHER novelty is given to the yarn by its expose of the stolen rare book racket, which has come to operate on an international scale of recent years, so a publicity blurb informs me. This is an aspect to book collecting which is interesting to know, if somewhat disillusioning. I had always pictured dealers in rare books as gentle old fellows,

richly cultivated and mellowed through their long contact with the world's finest literature, and really getting more pleasure from fondling their prized editions than from making money; but it seems that actually there are not a few rats in the business, sordidly mercenary knaves who would stuff you full of lead in a minute if it would yield them an early printing of Shelley or Keats. The hero and his wife, also dealers, operate as a sort of counteractive in the business, making most of their money by uncovering stolen volumes from hither and yon and selling them to insurance companies at a profit. It is their endeavor to unearth a stolen library, and later to discover a murderer, that gives them occasion for their monkeyshines.

Little Thorn Accompanies Posy . . .

THE picture has been conceived as a hundred per cent talkie, and there is accordingly plenty of talk, the opening expository portion in particular being done very much after the stage convention. But talkies, in which the camera is used largely as a reproductive device, can be vastly entertaining when the talk is as good as it is here. Buzzell, moreover, has set his dialogue in a good deal of physical action, so that never are the scenes stilted. In fact, in some scenes the camera is quite active. The only real flaw in the picture occurs in the final portion, when the yarn goes rather seriously melodramatic, loses some of its *Thin Mannish* flavor, and consequently some of its spell. The sequence in which the hero effects an extraordinarily clever and agile escape from his captors represents something of a change in viewpoint in the handling of the story, a forsaking of whimsicality for naivete. Moreover, when characters are permitted to be superhumanly clever, the cleverness of a plausibly human sort which they have previously shown no longer seems remarkable. Nothing is accomplished by this sequence, incidentally, since the villain escapes and has to be captured by the hero in the next sequence, again with extraordinary agility. All this gives the impression that the authors have run short of plot.

Spotlighting the Players . . .

BE THAT as it may, the film is lots of fun most of the time. Melvyn Douglas tops his previous comedy performances, and Florence Rice makes her debut in a new kind of part with complete success. Effective too is Claire Dodd, playing a shady lady of unusual refinement—perhaps acquired from the books. She sports a strange new make-up which makes her look intriguing unfathomable. Shepperd Strudwick, from Broadway, appears as a young murder suspect. One feels he is a capable actor, but he has not yet caught the knack of getting his personality into the camera. Of course, his role is not a strong one, the character being rather fabricated and summarily dismissed. Playing his distraught sweetheart is Mary Howard, fresh from the MGM “Laboratory of Acting.” She is competent in the part, but needs a little more general grooming yet, especially in the direction of make-up. Louis Calhern again brings his suave

meanness to the screen in highly expert fashion, and Nat Pendleton, Douglas Dumbrille, Dwight Frye are among others who contribute efficiently to the proceedings.

CAMERA WORK IS STRIKING . . .

● **TROPIC HOLIDAY**; Paramount release of Arthur Hornblow, Jr., production; directed by Theodore Reed; screen play, Don Hartman, Frank Butler, John C. Moffit and Duke Atterberry; from story by Don Hartman and Frank Butler; photographed by Ted Tetzlaff; special photographic effects by Farciot Edouart; art direction, Hans Dreier and Robert Usher; edited by Archie Marshek; musical direction, Boris Morros; dance direction, LeRoy Prinz; costumes, Edith Head; assistant director, Hal Walker; songs by Ned Washington and Augustin Lara. Cast: Bob Burns, Dorothy Lamour, Ray Milland, Martha Raye, Binnie Barnes, Tito Guizar, Elvira Rios, Roberto Soto, Michael Visaroff, Bobby Moya, Fortunio Bonanova; Pepito, Matt McHugh, Irving Bacon.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

FROM a production standpoint *Tropic Holiday* is an unusual musical. It is a pageant of visual and aural pleasures. A host of talented Mexican artists; beauteous señoritas, parading about in unique and colorful costumes by Edith Head; and highly atmospheric backgrounds are set into really striking photographic compositions by Ted Tetzlaff, with special effects by Farciot Edouart. This unusual photographic treatment, together with the subject matter, makes the picture an extremely languid affair, replete with moonlit waters, breathless nights, swelling passions. It seems our Latin brethren to the south have nothing to do but laze about and dream of amour. Romantically inclined persons should find the opus very gratifying. From an artistic viewpoint, however, the sustained mood and atmosphere which Director Theodore Reed has got into the picture make it something different and interesting in the way of musicals. The story, I warn, is very slight. It has a comedy highlight or two, but the outcome of the love interest is a foregone conclusion, and one feels that the players are going through their parts only to afford occasion for the musical and scenic pageantry to be brought to the screen. Whether the visual and aural beauty of the production will overweight the lack of firmer story stuff is dependent on the spectator's personal equation.

Latin-Americans Should Like It . . .

THIS emphasis on song and dance, however, should assure the success of the picture in Mexico and South American countries. I cannot recall any previous American picture, at least a musical, which has so given expression to—I am tempted to say “glorified”—the Mexican civilization. Among the Mexican performers featured in the cast are Tito Guizar, the very smouldering songstress Elvira Rios, Roberto Soto, the Ascencio sisters, and the San Cristobal Marimba Band. Music for the show was composed by Augustin Lara, noted Mexican song writer. Though it is similar to our own dance music, it has a distinctive flavor, and the instrumentation given it by Boris Morros emphasizes its difference. Paramounters choose to designate it as “Fling” music, whatever is

meant by that. *The Lamp on the Corner* will probably attain the greatest popular favor. The lyrics were by Ned Washington.

Bullfight Is Exciting . . .

A COMEDY highlight of the show is Martha Raye's bullfight, the lass having been inveigled into taking the place of an indisposed toreador. The sequence is very hoke, but exciting. Miss Raye is speaking in somewhat more moderate tones these days, and to good effect. Most of the real wit in the picture, though, is gotten off by Bob Burns, whose lines are in marked contrast to those of the other players with respect to effectiveness. Tito Guizar seemed to register most strongly of the musical artists, having a voice of really fine quality and displaying it with a good deal of spirit. Dorothy Lamour's moody renditions were agreeable. I suppose the fact that she never convinced as a Mexican señorita is irrelevant. Certainly she exudes plenty of this and that. Ray Milland is efficient as the Hollywood scenario writer who falls in love with the Latin charmer and spends most of his time being sung to. The ever-pleasing Binnie Barnes, Roberto Soto, Michael Visaroff and others are good in smaller parts. Young Bobby Moya, a cute lad, does very well as Miss Lamour's little brother.

AGED MAN IS THE HERO . . .

● **YOUNG FUGITIVES**; Universal picture and release; associate producer, Barney A. Sarecky; director, John Rawlins; screen play by Ben Grauman Kohn and Charles Grayson; based on an original story by Edward James; photography, George Robinson; art director, Ralph DeLacy; film editor, Frank Gross; musical director, Charles Previn; dialogue director, Sarah C. Haney. Cast: Harry Davenport, Robert Wilcox, Dorothea Kent, Larry Blake, Clem Bevans, Myra McKinney, Henry Roquemore, Tom Ricketts, Mary Treen, William Benedict.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

IN A recent issue of the *Spectator* Editor Beaton contended that the motion picture industry was overlooking a rich field of story material in not filming more stories which center about characters of advanced age. *Young Fugitives* fully proves his contention. It is a little tale of much charm, notable for its human interest values and its freshness of viewpoint. The hero is an old Civil War veteran, who, being the sole survivor among his buddies, comes into possession of fifty thousand dollars, a fund which has been accumulating among the old soldiers for many years, intended for the last of the lot. Spurning the attention of the townspeople, who had previously accorded him nothing but neglect, except on Decoration Day, when he headed their parade, the old fellow settles on a little farm. Here he is soon joined by the grandson of his deceased buddy, a young fellow who has fallen in with the wrong kind of companions in the big city, and is now attracted by the old man's money. The regeneration of the young man under the influence of the veteran's belief in him and of the wholesome country life—to say nothing of the good example set by an attractive

young woman—form a drama with some forceful emotional highlights. There are certain philosophical undercurrents in the piece, some of which might have been stressed even more strongly to advantage.

Every Inch a Trouper . . .

HARRY DAVENPORT gives a vivid portrayal of the old soldier. In both whimsical moments and those of pathos he is every inch the trouper. His performance, however, though outstanding, is but one of the gallery of interesting portraits Director John Rawlins spreads before us. Rawlins has told his story with a good deal of skill. His camera searches, it looks around, follows the characters, sneaks up on them, stares at them. And he makes the characters do things to illustrate what they are. Rawlins' treatment, in fact, is probably superior to his story material. There is one ill-considered facet in the yarn which the spectator must come to terms with and accept as plausible before he can give his interest whole-heartedly to the action. It is this—the old man's being so indifferent or careless as to leave a fortune in cash reposing in an unlocked cabinet drawer. And certainly the designing young man would have been secretly searching for the money, in which case he surely would have found it. Seems to me the story would have been strengthened by having the money concealed somewhere, say, behind a loose brick in the attic. The boy could have been shown peering about for it, and this would have lent an added element of suspense. This unconvincing circumstance, however, does not greatly affect the human values in the picture, and spectators should not find it an obstruction to their sympathy with the characters.

Photography and Music First-Rate . . .

FROM a production standpoint the piece is handsomely staged. Excellent photography from George Robinson greatly enhances it, and the able Charles Previn has provided an effective musical background for a considerable portion of the picture. Of the players, Robert Wilcox and Dorthea Kent, as the boy and girl, both have a good grasp of their roles, albeit I thought Miss Kent looked a little well-groomed for a lady tramp. Clem Bevans and Tom Ricketts do outstanding character work, and Larry Blake, Myra McKinney and Mary Treen are among others characterizing effectively. The original story was by Edward James, and the screen play was penned by Ben Grauman Kohn and Charles Grayson.

DIRECTION MAKES IT OUTSTANDING . . .

● **PRISON FARM**; a Paramount picture; associate producer, Stuart Walker; director, Louis King; original story, Edwin V. Westrate; screen play, Eddie Welch, Robert Yost and Stuart Anthony; photographer, Harry Fischbeck, A.S.C.; film editor, Edward Dmytryk; assistant director, Mel Epstein; art director, Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; sound, Harold Lewis and John Cope; interiors, A. E. Freudeman; musical direction, Boris Morros. Cast: Shirley Ross, Lloyd Nolan, John Howard, J. Carrol Naish, Porter Hall, Esther Dale, May Boley, Marjorie Main, Ann Q. Nilsson, John Hart.

Reviewed by Tom Miranda

ONCE again this clever director turns an ancient yarn into a scintillating picture packed with thrills, suspense and entertainment. There isn't a dull moment. The picture moves along easily with natural development, unexpected twists and turns that keep one on the edge of his (or her) seat most of the time. Director Louis King knows how people act in every-day life and he makes his cast behave accordingly. In those intense dramatic moments so often developed into melodrama by actors and actresses who are permitted to rave and shout at one another, Louis keeps the characters in his pictures as near human as possible. For instance, in one of the greatest fights I ever have seen on the screen, the combat is brought about by two quietly spoken accusations. Nolan, who has robbed an express driver of fifty thousand dollars and hidden the bills under the lining of his coat, offers Naish, the guard of the farm, \$500 for his freedom. Naish agrees to accept the bribe. But suspecting Nolan has hidden money somewhere, he follows him, crawls through the window of a shack and faces Nolan with the stolen bills. Nolan attempts to hide the loot. Naish accuses him. Nolan calmly answers: "So what?" Both realize that to speak loudly or create too much of a rumpus will be to alarm the prison farm guards and wreck their plan to get possession of the money and perhaps make a get-a-way with it. Naish attempts to take the money. Nolan socks him in the jaw. He falls and the fight is on. And what a fight!

May Boley Does Well . . .

BEYOND doubt Messrs. Welch, Yost and Anthony provided King with a well-written screen play. They are experienced masters of the art. But it is the direction of the players that impresses one; that makes the story convincing. Shirley Ross is not only beautiful to look at, even when she is enslaved in the prison laundry, but she knows how to troupe. Her performance is excellent. Lloyd Nolan plays the leading part without a flaw in his acting. A tough part, too. But almost I hoped he would redeem himself and win back Shirley's love before the picture ended. Outstanding, and often stealing the scenes in which she appears, is May Boley in the characterization of "Shifty" Sue. If her agents aren't kept busy signing contracts for her future appearance in pictures, I'm no prophet. She knows when to get a laugh and how to space it. And when she died from burns received in rescuing Shirley from the horrors of a prison riot, I saw a number of women in

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the audience pressing handkerchiefs to their wet eyes. John Howard as the prison doctor does well in a minor part; Marjorie Main is splendid as Matron Brand, the cruel mistress of the women's quarters; J. Carrol Naish as the crooked prison guard, Porter Hall, the warden, Anna Q. Nilsson as Maton Ames, Esther Dale as Cora Waxley, all are more than capable in their parts. Several times I caught glimpses of Mae Busch, Howard Mitchell and other notables of yesteryear, and was pleased to see them working. Nice photography, good sets, both interior and exterior, dress the picture with satisfaction. And I recommend it to any exhibitor with assurance that none of his patrons will ask for their money back.

A PASSPORT TO ENTERTAINMENT . . .

● **PASSPORT HUSBAND**; Twentieth Century-Fox production; executive producer, Sol Wurtzel; director, James Tinling; screen play, Karen de Wolf and Robert Chapin; based on an original story by Hilda Stone; photography, Edward Snyder, A.S.C.; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Haldane Douglas; set decorations, Thomas Little; film editor, Nick De Maggio; costumes, Herschel; sound, E. Clayton Ward and William H. Anderson; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Stuart Erwin, Pauline Moore, Douglas Fowley, Joan Woodbury, Robert Lowery, Harold Huber, Edward S. Brophy, Paul McVey, Lon Chaney, Jr., Joseph Sawyer.

Reviewed by Tom Miranda

WILL SOMEBODY please tell me why they call them "B" pictures? The only difference between this "B" and most of the "A" productions turned out by this and other producing companies is that Sol Wurtzel probably held the production cost down to about one-half or perhaps one-third of the cost of most "A" productions. But in so doing he has deprived the picture of nothing worthwhile. This story of the slow-thinking, slow-moving son of a millionaire who left the family board, because he did not like the manner in which the family millions were being acquired, to make his way through life as a buss boy in a cafe rendezvous of racketeers, and finds himself thrown into a network of situations from which escape, though most desirable, seems almost impossible, provides Stuart Erwin with one of the liveliest, funniest and most enjoyable comedy dramas of his career. James Tinling's direction is excellent throughout. The picture moves with lightning speed. Suspense, laughter, suspense, laughter, with no let down. Occasionally I felt that a pause would have been refreshing.

Good Box-Office Picture . . .

THE gags are new, and if the high-class audience that sat in judgment and roared with laughter means anything, I would say that it meant a flood of money into the box-office wherever shown. Stuart Erwin never was better, and that's saying plenty. He is one of my favorite stars of the screen. And in *Passport Husband* he shines brighter than ever before. Pauline Moore is easy to take, and I wondered why Stuart didn't take her sooner. But in that case Hilda Stone's sparkling comedy would have ended all too soon. Aside from a little too much mugging and throwing of vases, etc., Conchita, ably played

by clever Joan Woodbury, almost stole the picture. I am not completely familiar with the technique of sound, but if the spoken lines of the racketeer in the cafe scenes could be reduced to normal conversation, it would lend reality and much needed contrast to the opening scenes of the picture. After Tiger Martin is deported, it doesn't much matter how loud the characters speak. The action is so fast and the situations so full of suspense, and the laughs so frequent, anything that happens is acceptable. Photography, sets, and art work satisfactory. Screen play by De Wolf and Chapin must have been good. How could anybody write a poor script around a story by Hilda Stone? And Nick De Maggio (whose name indicates that he knows how to play ball, maybe) deftly handled the shears. Congratulations, Sol. Production excellent.

GREEN'S FIRST A KNOCKOUT . . .

● **MERIDIAN 7-1212**; a Twentieth Century-Fox production; associate producer, Howard J. Green; director, H. Bruce Hummerstone; screen play, Jerry Cady; original story, Irving Reis; photography, Virgil Miller, A.S.C.; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Chester Gore; film editor, Jack Murray; costumes, Herschel; sound, Joseph E. Aiken and William H. Anderson; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Gloria Stuart, Michael Whalen, Douglas Fowley, Robert Kellard, Chick Chandler, Jane Darwell, Jean Rogers, June Gale, Ruth Hussey, Cliff Clark, Peter Lynn, Edward Marr, Lester Matthews.

Reviewed by Tom Miranda

RING three bells—loudly and long—for Howard J. Green's first personally supervised picture under the Twentieth Century-Fox banner. It's a murder-mystery done in comedy drama fashion, with a laugh-a-minute thrill-a-minute tempo, starring delightful Gloria Stuart as the persistent bill collector, teamed with handsome Michael Whalen, the roving reporter, who owes Gloria's boss a fifteen-dollar balance on a trombone with which, judging from the quality of the music he produces on it, he has been annoying the neighborhood. Right or wrong, I was hoping that Gloria would take the thing back to her employer. But for once I was wrong. That trombone plays an important part in the story. And what a story! One moment your heart is pounding with excitement. The next moment your sides are splitting from laughter. Much of the hilarity is due to the antics of smart-cracking Chick Chandler, photographic aide to Whalen, and who rapidly is becoming my favorite comedian of the screen. As a trio out to produce laughs, Gloria Stuart, Whalen and Chandler are the tops. And Executive Producer Sol Wurtzel who occasionally, though not very often, overlooks a good bet, no doubt will continue working them together.

Fowley in Convincing Performance . . .

DOUGLAS FOWLEY gives an excellent and thoroughly convincing characterization of the gang leader who sacrifices his life in an attempt to prove to Whalen that another and not himself committed the crime of which Whalen, his friend of long standing, has accused him. Fowley's gang leader is true to life,

and I ought to know. I've personally met some of the most notorious. The beautiful young telephone operator who announces the time for the benefit of inquiring patrons, and whose charming voice plays havoc with Chick Chandler's heart (and did with mine), will go a long way on the road to stardom, if given a bigger opportunity to display her talents. Likewise, boy friend Robert Kellard has plenty on the ball. The remaining members of a large cast give excellent performances. Jerry Cady's screen play based on Irving Reis' original story has provided Director H. Bruce Humberstone with a vehicle in which he takes you on a thrilling and enjoyable ride through a maze of events which never fail to click. In other words, direction perfect. Jack Murray wielded a mean pair of shears with editorial perfection, and this is the old maestro speaking. Yes, sir, I liked the picture. And despite the fact that just previous to the preview I had laughed continuously for one hour, watching the gorgeous Ginger Rogers in *Vivacious Lady*. My congratulations to all who had any part in the making of *Meridian 7-1212*. Sound, costumes, art direction, sets, photography, 100 per cent. My congratulations also to exhibitors fortunate enough to get *Meridian 7-1212* for a first run.

CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by

RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD
of
MABEL KEEFER

GOOD NEIGHBOR LEAGUE announces plans for a "Canadian-American Good Neighbor Celebration," marking 125 years of peace between Canada and the United States, for autumn observance in 100 cities on both sides of the border. The celebration will take the form of a chain of dinners, with an exchange of speakers for discussions of social and economic questions of common interest. . . . Well, little scratch pad, that is fine as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough; it does not reach the youth of the two countries. As you and I have proclaimed so often, there should be an "Assembly" of the youth of the United States and Canada, on the border, and there should be drums and trumpets and waving flags (no speeches), to project the idea that an unarmed frontier is a glorious achievement.

* * *

A READER of the *New York Times* writes to the screen editor to protest against the "belts on the jaw and swift kicks in the pants," the motion picture industry has been subjected to. He deplores the fact that the indictments come from "people who have little knowledge of so highly a specialized business and the intricate problems that producers are constantly confronted with." Oh, dear! "By what authority do they dare advise a producer, one who has given his life to the making of motion pictures, who has his personal fortune in it, and must of nec-

essity protect the interests of his stockholders, how to produce and what to produce?" By what right, indeed! Those critical people just better mind their own business! After all, they do not have to attend the motion picture theatre—nobody forces them to!

* * *

WONDER if radio announcers really believe all those encomiums they shower on mediocre (or even worse) performers?

* * *

FRANK NUGENT of the *New York Times*, in his review of *Kidnapped*, says: "The question inevitably arises: why did they bother with Stevenson at all? Why not write a story of their own, as they virtually did anyway, give it a different title and let the film stand by itself as an original Hollywood adventure tale?" But, Mr. Nu-u-gent! Hollywood—remember? It is Hollywood you are talking about! Had you forgotten for the nonce?

* * *

WARNER BROTHERS' *Heart of the North*, a story of the Northwest Mounted Police, will have airplanes instead of horses, so we are told. I could weep salty tears every time I think of the Canadian Mounties without their horses.

* * *

JUST read an item stating that it is possible to cook a ham by radio. Now, just what does that mean? Ham. . . . Radio. . . . Radio ham—oh, well, let's skip it!

* * *

AFTER: I seem to want to sigh; I seem to want to cry; I feel so restless and blue. I wish *someone* were near—*someone* who's grown so dear—*someone* who'd be tender and true. Earth seems full of sadness, yet, so full of gladness; my heart is filled with joy and pain. Thrilling with laughter—tears coming after—I wait to see *someone* again. . . . Can this be love—this feeling of queerness? Can this be love—this thought of *someone's* dearness? The sound of *someone's* voice makes my heart rejoice, and I'm waiting all the while for *someone's* smile. It must be love—this feeling of queerness! It must be love—this thought of *someone's* dearness! This sense of something wanting—these memories haunting. . . . It must be love.

* * *

WHAT is this I read about Michael Bartlett sailing for England to do Nanky Poo in a screen version of *The Mikado*? Are we, then, at long last, to have a Gilbert & Sullivan film? With the wide scope of territory covered by the cinema, what might not the psychological effect of Gilbert's wit and Sullivan's infectious music do to England and America—yea, even to the cinematic box-office?

* * *

SOMETHING has reminded me of a line that Editor Beaton wrote a few years ago, which should have made the "Toward a More Picturesque Speech" page of the *Reader's Digest*. Describing the tail of a peacock, he said: ". . . the quills as strings in a mighty harp quivering with a rhapsody in hues."

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

A GLITTERING SCORE . . .

A GLITTERING score has been provided by the versatile Max Steiner for MGM's super-Robinsonade *The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse*. I may have overlooked his name among the screen credits, and no mention of this eminently resourceful musician is made on the credit sheet, but the studio office assures me that Max Steiner is responsible for this deft melange of appropriate quotations and original sound episodes. I can say nothing better about the music as a whole than that it matches the subtle irony and dramatic suspense of a superbly paced picture. Direction and acting are imbued with a tempo as amusingly deliberate as the innuendos in the dialogue. In turn, Max Steiner has added music of the same tempo and that same well calculated satire. It is like seeing by means of field glasses a gun fired far away. One sees the flash of fire, long before the crash of the detonation and its reverberations have their surprise effect on those not aware of the sudden gunnery. It is a musically natural score. That is to say, there are no beautiful effects for their own sake. It is not a concert with a picture-foreground. And still it is a fine score, charged with actual and implied action.

Real and Risible . . .

MAX STEINER'S whimsical score for *The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse* appeals to me because it does not spell realism with a capital "r". The picture opens with a musicale at a socially prominent home. One hears the usual vocal excerpts in convincing bits, sung neither too well, nor below the kind of singing to be expected on such an occasion. The musicale is of secondary importance in the dramatic development of the picture story, hence the music should not over-emphasize the plot importance of the scene. And, of course, it does not, well as it is made technically. Steiner makes bizarre and grotesque music of a mild modernity for his gangster scenes. The height of whimsicality is reached when—on the screen a phonograph is turned on—and one hears Mozart's *Kleine Nacht Musik* (I believe) while *Clitterhouse* makes his blood tests on the hooligans. This exquisite music goes on while the gangsters squabble. The scene takes place in a music studio building, where the gang (carrying instrument cases by way of decoy), has a hangout. The score waxes genuinely dramatic while *Clitterhouse* is temporarily trapped. It positively creates a sensation of the leery, dizzy as the drugged bandit loses his mental grip. In short, a first-rate Steiner score, subtly realistic and exquisitely whimsical.

Silly Symphony Scores . . .

WITH all due respect for the importance of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, and the reverence due them at the right moment, I take full pleasure in seeing our solemn "guyed" now and then. Even a cat may look at a king and meow without being asked

to do so by royal command. Which does not mean that I like the classics turned into swing music. That is mere grand larceny for commercial gain. That is a brazen admission that certain gentlemen, calling themselves composers, prove themselves de-composers because they have run short even of their own melodic platitudes. But when Walt Disney or now Warner's *Silly Symphonies* grab Weber or some other hallowed personage for a few moments of hilarious fun, none of the gods and goddesses of history and tradition can blush with indignation. The Warnerian *Penguin Parade*, including take-offs on "Bong Crispy," "Genny Goodman" and other grandiloquent figures of radio, screen and dance band fame is good fun. Incidentally, these music-comic strips good-naturedly prick some greatly inflated estimation. Musical satire, when it is sound of heart, is wholesome for the public state of affairs and grand fun.

Too Much Stunting . . .

I MUST forego giving names where credit is due, because I saw (or heard) *The Gold Diggers of Paris* on an off-night. It always impresses me as strange that there should not be a printed program for a major picture at a major theatre, so that the public would have a souvenir or a reminder of whom, and what they have enjoyed. Warner's *Gold Diggers*, by not too broad a margin avoids falling into the deplorable class of super-jazz-triple-plated spectacles which seem like an enforced clearance sale of band stunts and stunting bands, saccharine ballads and hosiery display by way of tap dancing en masse. One of the best tunes in the picture is *I Want to Go Back to Bali*. It is charmingly introduced and my sincere compliments go to Rudy Vallee for a very pleasing voice well managed. He is not altogether lucky in the kind of tunes handed him and in the manner in which they occur. The Schnickelfritzes appear four times and that means three times too often and their scenes are too long. Some outdoor jazz-bits (Gershwinian) are likable, but on various occasions, orchestrations are done badly for some of the indoor dance scenes in a production proving musically smart quite often.

Magazine Evokes Enthusiasm . . .

NOT only critics but also composers do not always agree. As a matter of fact they disagree quite often. This very difference of opinion makes music such an entertaining art and composers still more entertaining people. It is also this division of minds which makes the League of Composers' quarterly magazine, called "Modern Music," so revealing and entertaining. Almost every page is written by active or inactive composers, by burning, burnt or burnt-out composers. Without a doubt, "Modern Music" is the most informative magazine on the contemporary scene in American music, and I would not like to lose a single issue of my file of this quarterly

which takes under its critical microscope also the important men and women writing music abroad. It also devotes a couple of pages to Hollywood and the cinema music. And while the observer on "the Hollywood front," George Antheil, has yet to say or to discover for himself much of moment, it is with real impatience that I anticipate his remarks on the program of picture music which is to occupy an entire evening, August 2, at the Hollywood Bowl. Hollywood film composers, as a rule, are tolerant men. The reason is that they are well paid. But on that night, gentle murder will smoulder in the hearts of some. Some will be bitter because their music was not heard. More devastating will be the feeling of the man who wishes that some other fellow's music had been played instead of his. Even in Hollywood the composers do not agree.

Concerning Composers . . .

TRULY, the composers of Hollywood are men of patience. This is one reason why I doubt whether they will lend themselves to being packed into a composers' union of Hollywood and become an appanage of the American Federation of Musicians and of the Los Angeles local in particular. A resolution to unionize them was passed somewhere, but, as far as I can gather the voting was not done by the composers. As it is, they already belong to one or more protective and collective organizations such as the ASCAP for instance. True enough, they like to have some providential agency, as the one mentioned, forage and fight for them. It will take another Freud to psycho-analyze these men, who, competing with each other, compare royalties and lost racing bets while they lap up noodle soup or some egg delicacy for luncheon at the studio commissary. One of the common denominators is the fact that when most ordinary mortals sit down for a mid-day meal, the film composer devotes himself to a secondary, but not unsubstantial breakfast. Hollywood composers are not only tolerant, they are submissive. The secondary breakfasts in the studios have something to do with it. The food is usually served with more grace than it is prepared. What makes a composer further more submissive are his agent and the producer. I have come to the conclusion that he works for both of them.

Cherchez les Femmes . . .

WHEN one thinks of it, Hollywood, though so much a women's world, is entirely without women composers. If I am wrong, then I should like to be corrected. Of course, Hollywood, that is to say the men who rule Hollywood of the films, surrender a large share of their domain to the fair sex. But apart from rather subdued looking stenographers and self-reliant (sometimes quite unpleasant secretaries), the music department, as far as the making of music is concerned, is a masculine world. It is a world which women have not yet conquered as far as jobs are concerned. This brings up the subject of the woman composer in general, but I will not discuss it, because it is not a fruitful one. I hasten to say that however

few women are on the music departmental payrolls of the different studios, the music written there is very largely written to melt the feminine heart. The idea is to produce "everybody sings them" songs. This naturally means that the kind of tune which Johnnie can sing under the shower and whistle as he opens the door to his office must be kept within a certain range, a very small range. While women story writers and scenarists are quite frequent (there are even women directors and women cutters), women lyricists in the films are scarce. There is Dorothy Fields at RKO who shares honors and shekels with Jerome Kern. She is almost an exception.

Time and Quantity . . .

COMPOSERS in Hollywood are tolerant of each other, although they may differ along lines of technic. Clever craftsmanship and invention finds enthusiastic praise. There exists a ready understanding of the other man's problems and difficulties. Every well managed music department has its system, but ideas come out of individuals. And film music is a matter of ideas. The problem of sufficient time in which to compose and those last hour cuts in the film which cause the composers violent headaches, still are the chief causes for concern. But opinions differ, some insisting that the composer should sit in already on story conferences. Kurt Weill, the composer of operas and a man of much theatre experience, believes that the composer should be on the production staff from the start, helping to shape the scenario and be present at the shooting of important scenes. Werner Janssen goes to the other extreme. If he likes a story then he studies the characters by means of a script, but he cares nothing about coming to the studio or about seeing part of the film as it is in the making. He prefers to wait until the very end until the film is completed. Then, with the aid of a good musical staff, he is willing to work fast and furiously. He wrote the music for *Blockade* in nine days, although he had to rewrite music for the eighth reel five times, because Director Dieterle and Producer Wanger changed the order of scenes as often.

About Large Scores . . .

JANSSEN knows every note, so to speak, which goes into his score. He prefers a small orchestra, about thirty-six players, but makes every instrument add its value of color and dramatic emphasis. Although his is a compact score, rewriting a reel five times, when there is music lasting five minutes and forty-three seconds in that reel, is no small job even



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when there is plenty of time. Dmitri Tiomkin, now finishing the music for MGM's *Great Waltz*, likes to work with a big orchestra. He has had between eighty and ninety musicians on the floor for every important scene. Herbert Stothart does not insist on numbers. His music for *Marie Antoinette* will prove not only one of the long scores—more than ninety minutes in all, but in as much as the picture may be shown in two portions, with an intermission, his has been the interesting task of writing something like a second act prelude to pick up atmosphere. Speaking of large scores, there is Korngold's contribution to *Robin Hood*, composed and completed in seven weeks. If present Warner Brothers' plans do not undergo a change, the Viennese composer will have the interesting task of writing a score for *Wilhelm Tell*. And how amused the late Signor Rossini must be at such news.

Why Not Folk Songs? . . .

CHARLES PREVIN of Universal has done the logical thing in *Young Fugitives* when he used American folk songs. I like particularly the manner in which he treated the tune *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, even though it reminded me a bit of the *American Overture*, by Roy Harris, which is largely based on that melody. There exists an unfounded and unholy fear among producers of using traditional tunes. While Victor Young made an effective score for *Wells Fargo*, more atmosphere could have been produced by the employment of old-time tunes. Antheil is said to have introduced folk material in the two de Mille pictures, *The Plainsman* and *The Buccaneer*, but how much was left after the final cutting? He is now at work on the music for *Union Pacific*. Hageman is looking at the first few reels of Frank Lloyd's *If I Were King*. It will be interesting to hear how much of old French chansons the composer of *Caponsacchi* will weave into his score. Composers and promotion departments are apt to forget that there is a large public, young and adult, which could be interested with authentic melodies. Stokowski foresaw this in *One Hundred Men and a Girl*, and he was right, as usual.

DEAR Welford, "a Director," in the Spectator which came today, shows me how I can give the Spectator some advertising revenue without bringing down on me the gang of advertising salesmen who would haunt my footsteps if my name ever appeared in your advertising columns.

Assign half a page to me and put in it something about how a reader enjoys your intelligent comments on pictures. Keep my name out of it. Put me down as just

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My name has never appeared in an advertisement, nor do I wish it to appear now, but I would like to follow the example of the anonymous director, who, in the Spectator of June 25, expressed in a page advertisement his appreciation of the fine work you are doing for motion pictures in general.

Put anything you please on the page, send me a bill and I will remit promptly.

Hollywood **SPECTATOR**

10 CENTS

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—July 23, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 13

REVIEWED BY THE EDITOR

MARIE ANTOINETTE

Too Long; Cedric Gibbons Its Hero

PROFESSOR, BEWARE!

Harold Lloyd Gives Camera a Chance

LOVE COMES TO ANDY HARDY

Metro Once More Does Itself Proud

THE TEXANS

Joan Bennett's Gowns Are Devastating

SHOPWORN ANGEL

Metro Gives Us a Little Masterpiece

SKY GIANT

Good Cast in an Aviation Picture

I'LL GIVE A MILLION

Century Spoils a Good Opportunity

TERROR OF TINY TOWN

Jed Buell Provides Something New

OTHER REVIEWS

Little Tough Guy ★ Army Girl ★ Four's a Crowd ★ The Affairs of Annabel



From the EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

CHECKING UP ON MEMORY . . .

BEFORE viewing *Marie Antoinette* I burnished a twenty-two-year-old memory of a visit to Versailles by reading about it in several books of reference, among them Ferguson's *History of Architecture*, a comprehensive work by which all architects swear. Fortified by a letter from an important London editor, I had been tendered courtesies at Versailles somewhat beyond those accorded unfortified tourists, and brought away with me memories which I thought passing years had not dimmed. Versailles to me was a disappointment from an artistic standpoint, but stunning by virtue of its bulk. It is the only quarter-of-a-mile-long residence I ever saw, and the most exhausting to explore I ever entered. What renewed my interest in it were stills of *Marie Antoinette* which I saw prior to viewing the picture. One still showed an imposing entrance, another a grand staircase, a third, the largest set in the picture, a great ballroom in the Galerie de Glace which I remembered as one of the most gorgeous apartments in Europe available to tourists and also the longest and narrowest I ever had seen. I did not remember either the entrance or the staircase, nor could I account for the ballroom.

We Consult An Authority . . .

THE stills of the palace as the picture presents it sent me to Ferguson's noted work, and there my confidence in my memory was restored. I read: "Internally, the design (of Versailles) is as objectionable as that of the exteriors. The entrance is mean; there is no portico, no grand hall, no staircase worthy of such a palace, no vestibule, or any arrangement that would impart either dignity or poetry to the whole. So much so is this the case that very few persons are probably aware where the principal entrance really was, and fewer would believe if told that it was only an insignificant doorway on the right hand side of the Cour Royale, near the principal staircase."

Camera Glamour and Fact . . .

WHEN I viewed the Metro production I knew I was viewing a generally authentic Versailles, but marvelled at the glamour the camera gave it. I went back to Ferguson, and read: "Since there is no variety in the design and nothing to compare it with or give scale, it looks like an ordinary row of street

houses three stories high. Only with considerable difficulty . . . can it be ascertained that it is larger and taller than any ordinary mansion and is in fact a palace of colossal dimensions. . . . By repeating the same features over and over again through a facade twenty times the length of its height, Mausart has gratuitously used all the resources of his art to make that look mean and insignificant which is really grand and magnificent . . . stamping mediocrity and almost meanness on the largest and most gorgeous palace of Europe."

If Cedric Had Been Available . . .

FACT is a cumbersome handmaiden of fiction; the motion picture camera and screen story requirements are despots whose whims must be respected. The sum total of my memory, Ferguson, and the picture was vast respect for the extraordinary ability of Cedric Gibbons. At first glance it would seem that the task which faced him was one merely of reproducing a few historic buildings, and particularly buildings on which there exists a mass of helpful research in the form of plans, measured drawings and other data. He could have given us a strictly authentic Versailles, but it would have robbed the picture of most of its arresting visual appeal. Instead, he set about making good the omissions of an architect who muffed one of the greatest opportunities a member of his profession ever had, an architect, who, by courting littleness, missed the magnificent grandeur he might have attained. It was the misfortune of Louis XIV that the time and place of the birth of Cedric had not made him available to convert the hunting lodge of the previous Louis into the Versailles the picture presents.

Faced An Interesting Problem . . .

CEDRIC could not give free rein to his artistic imagination in designing the *Marie* sets. Too many of the people who have seen Versailles will see the picture. But more important than that is the fact that the most important feature of the production—the story—is something Cedric had no hand in fashioning. He had to build for the story, not for fact, but he had to make us think we were viewing fact. The exigencies of players' entrances and exits made it necessary for him to make adjacent several rooms which in the real palace probably were as far

apart as a quarter of a mile. If the locale of the story had been purely imaginary, Cedric could have indulged in any architectural flight of fancy that made provision for the mechanics of the dramatic production; but given such an historically authentic document as the script of *Marie Antoinette*, he faced what probably was the most interesting problem an art director ever was given to solve, one that only a great art director could solve satisfactorily.

Would Resemble a Tunnel . . .

TAKE the problem of the ballroom, or Galerie de Glace, which, as I have said, is the largest set in the picture. Its rich marbles and decorations make it one of the most imposing apartments in Europe, but it is 320 feet long and only 35 feet wide. On the screen it would look like a tunnel, a mere long gallery with no point of interest and leading nowhere. That, at least, is what I gather from the picture would be Cedric Gibbon's first thought as he sat down to study the problem of making provision for the staging of the ballroom sequence. Always there must have been haunting him the thought of the millions of people who had visited Versailles and had seen no ballroom of the dimensions his had to have. His problem became the interesting one of designing and building a gallery which would disregard truth, but at the same time would make those who had visited Versailles not quite sure that truth had been disregarded. On Cedric's side was the fact of the very magnitude of Versailles militating against a true conception of its details being carried away by the average visitor. Once when I was writing some impressions of a visit to Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris, I included in it a description of choir stalls which just in time I remembered were those I had seen in St. Paul's, London.

Cedric Is a Genius . . .

TRUTH must be an annoyance to a motion picture art director, a curb on his own creative instincts. In the instance of *Marie*, Cedric Gibbons had to design and build, in a convincing Mausart style, a part of the palace which never existed, design and build it so convincingly that there would be a minimum of adverse reaction to the liberty taken. This means that he had to pour himself into the creative mould of another man's style. Only a genius could do that and get away with it. Cedric is a genius.

* * *

GREAT PICTURE POSSIBILITIES . . .

A NEW book which reached me last week is Fredrick Arnold Kummer's latest, *The Great Road*. It caused me to dip into the files for a letter which was received last month, the writer, Worthington Hollyday, a distinguished Baltimorean student and lecturer. As I have not been back from a holiday trip long enough to catch up with my writing, I am going to let Mr. Hollyday tell you about the book. He writes: "While on a recent lecture tour I spent some weeks in and around Hollywood, and read some of your splendid peace editorials in the *Spectator*. I have tried to do a little work along these lines

also, as I have been lecturing on the Scandinavian countries, and in my lectures I hold Sweden up as a shining example of what a high state of civilization a country can attain to during a century and a quarter of peace. There has just come to my attention a very remarkable book called *The Great Road*, by Frederic Arnold Kummer, the author and dramatist, which I cannot help thinking could be made the basis of a tremendously powerful peace film.

Show Futility of War . . .

"THIS book," Mr. Hollyday continues, "deals with the ancient highway between Babylon and Egypt, over which, during the past six thousand years, all the great conquerors of history have passed. Mr. Kummer presents them in a magnificent and glittering panorama, from the time of Abraham and Rameses, down to the taking of Jerusalem by General Allenby in World War days. The underlying motif of the book is to show the futility of war, of conquest, the advantages of peace. As Mr. Kummer has *The Great Road* say, in the epilogue: 'I am the road of the Conquerors. Over my breast all the Great of the Earth have passed, leaving behind only some names carved on a rock . . . a little dust . . . but I go on.' The conquerors vanish, but the peaceful caravans of commerce go on. I cannot help wishing that some producer of vision would make use of this brilliant book as the basis for a great peace film."

* * *

GUESSING THE "MARIE" RUN . . .

TWO pictures, as far apart in theme, production and appeal as two could be, are *Snow White* and *Marie Antoinette*. The latter follows the former into the Carhay Circle Theatre. Enthusiastic Metro exploiters have predicted in print that the run of *Marie* will exceed the eighteen-week run of the Disney feature. The exploiters are too enthusiastic. My guess is that *Marie* will not run half as long as *Snow White* ran. I give *Marie* eight weeks, four weeks on the merits of the picture and four weeks under forced draft provided by Metro publicity.

* * *

NEELY BILL STILL ALIVE . . .

THE film industry has little reason to congratulate itself upon the fact that Congress adjourned without enacting the Neely bill into law. The bill is not dead; it is taking a nap between sittings of Congress. To show the wide extent of interest in the fate of the bill, I quote from *Christian Century*, an undenominational church paper which includes in its columns brilliant and searching editorials dealing with secular affairs: "It is noticeable that the attack by the industry continues to be concentrated on details of the Neely bill's provisions; very little is being said in defense of the block booking and blind selling principles as such. If, as the industry contends, strict application of the Neely proposals would prove ruinous, there is one simple way for Hollywood to escape that calamity. Let it come forward with a distribution plan which really does away with the evils of the present system by which bad pictures are foisted on helpless local exhibitors. It can do so, for it

has already had to do so in other countries. Once such a plan is put into effect, the need for a Neely bill will be ended. But it must offer a genuine open market plan; no more fake 10 per cent schemes, such as the Hays office announced a few years ago, will appease public wrath."

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

MAGNIFICENT PRESENTATION . . .

● **MARIE ANTOINETTE**; Metro release of Hunt Stromberg production; stars Norma Shearer and Tyrone Power; featured, John Barrymore, Robert Morley, Anita Louise, Joseph Schildkraut, Gladys George, Henry Stephenson; director, W. S. Van Dyke II; screen play, Claudine West, Donald Ogden Stewart and Ernest Vajda; based on book by Stefan Zweig; musical score, Herbert Stothart; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associate art directors, William A. Horning and Edwin B. Willis; gowns by Adrian; men's costumes, Gile Steele; photography, William Daniels; montage effects, Slavko Vorkapich; dances, Albertina Rasch; technical adviser, George Richelavie; film editor, Robert J. Kern. Supporting cast: Cora Witherspoon, Barnett Parker, Reginald Gardiner, Henry Daniell, Leonard Penn, Albert Van Dekker, Alma Kruger, Joseph Calleia, George Meeker, Scotty Beckett, Marilyn Knowlden.

MAGNIFICENTLY done; one of the greatest visual treats the screen ever has accorded the world. It is obvious Metro spared no money in its honest attempt to produce something extraordinary in the way of screen entertainment. Technically, *Marie Antoinette* is a notable achievement. In my *Easy Chair* (page 2), I discuss the contribution of the hero of the picture, Cedric Gibbons. In settings he and his associates designed and built, the Adrian gorgeous costumes are displayed, and William Daniels' camera creates photographic masterpieces, pictures of surpassing beauty which bring a brilliant yesterday to our eyes. And into this splash of splendor Metro has tossed one of the greatest casts ever assembled; has picked people out of history and made them live again within our range of vision. With unerring skill, talented writers have woven into the pattern of their screen play the incidents leading to the French Revolution which spattered blood on the pages of the history of France. Some years ago, Winfield Sheehan screened a bloody chapter in the modern history of the same country, but presented it as a background against which the story of an unimportant boy and equally unimportant girl was told. *Seventh Heaven* made us cry; *Marie Antoinette* leaves us cold. When we viewed *Seventh Heaven*, we did not know what was going to happen to the boy and girl; when we view *Marie Antoinette*, we know what is going to happen to Marie.

History As Screen Entertainment . . .

HISTORY as a background is good screen material; history as the story is not. In an effort to enlist our sympathy for Marie, the woman, Metro recreates for her a personality of its own conception and disregards the facts of the history it is recording; it gives her a romance which lacks screen value by virtue of our previous knowledge that nothing comes of it, and it serves only to lengthen a picture which

would be too long even without it. The romance is written ably and is played beautifully, but, particularly towards the end when the picture should approach its climax swiftly, it is more irritating than entertaining. Acting, as a substitute for story, never will prove satisfactory screen fare. What holds our interest in a motion picture is the manner in which it leads us logically to an ending of which we have no previous knowledge. It is asking too much when we must sit for two hours and a half before a screen upon which a story is plodding slowly towards an ending we already know. The first hour retains our interest by virtue of *Marie's* visual perfection, but by that time our esthetic sense has had enough; we want action and the ending, but the picture goes on and on.

Looking At Judy and Norma . . .

WHEN I viewed Metro's *Love Comes to Andy Hardy* the night before I saw *Marie*, a lump came to my throat as I saw in Judy Garland's eyes the pain caused by Mickey Rooney's failure to accept her as a grown person and not as a mere child. When I viewed Norma Shearer in her moments of greatest anguish, no lump came to my throat. The girl Judy played was previously unknown to me; she was not an actress playing a part. She was just a sweet little girl, a lonely one, craving the companionship of a lively boy who had captured her fancy, and I wanted to comfort her and buy her a lollypop. When I viewed the bigger Metro picture, I did not see *Marie Antoinette*. I knew she had been dead a century and a half. I saw Norma Shearer enacting some of the incidents of Marie's life; I admired the skill with which she enacted them, I reveled in her beauty, in the beauty of the creations she wore, in the distinction she gave the part she played, but it was my intellect she appealed to and satisfied. It was my emotions Judy Garland appealed to and stirred. One can stretch his emotions over a lot of picture, but the intellect soon gets enough. For the first hour or so, *Marie* thrilled me with its excellencies, but after that, as I knew the ending, I grew tired even of the excellencies. However, that this was a purely personal reaction was evidenced by the sniffing which rippled through the audience while some of the tenderest scenes were being played. Ordinarily I sniffle at the slightest provocation and I am in constant danger of being choked to death by a lump. I went to *Antoinette* expecting to cry but even the lump was not forthcoming.

Too Long On One Note . . .

AS PRESENTED at the Carthay Circle Theatre, *Marie Antoinette* is not a good show. For nearly three hours, from the beginning of the overture to the last strains of the exit music, there is no variation in the esthetic note. Picture audiences are not trained to expect programs of the sort. Even at such a long-run house as the Carthay Circle, the audience expects some music, a newsreel and perhaps a Disney short to precede the feature offering. At the legitimate theatre no such program is offered; a play the length of this picture would be broken into four acts. Here we have but one short, half-a-cigarette,

intermission. While one can applaud Metro's manner of presenting the story visually, even though he cannot applaud the choice of story, he must deplore the stupidity of the producers in not realizing what a big part music could have played in making such a long feast more digestible. When Hollywood's picture intelligence reaches maturity, all pictures will have continuous scores, but in *Marie Antoinette* we have a picture which even the dumbest producer should have realized demanded a continuous, softly played, score—unobtrusive music which the audience would not hear consciously but which would relieve the emotional strain of such a long film. There is music in some spots now. It would be interesting to know by what process of reasoning the spots were selected. One of the weirdest manifestations of complete ignorance of screen fundamentals is the scoring of isolated scenes and not the full picture.

BACK TO FIRST PRINCIPLES . . .

● **PROFESSOR, BEWARE!**; Harold Lloyd-Paramount; producer, Harold Lloyd; director, Elliott Nugent; assistant director, George Hippard; screen play, Delmer Davis; adaptation, Jack Cunningham and Clyde Bruckman; story, Crampton Harris, Francis Cockrell and Marian B. Cockrell; photographer, Archie Stout; film editor, Duncan Mansfield; art direction, Al D'Agastino; sound recording, Earl Sitar. Cast: Harold Lloyd, Phyllis Welch, Raymond Walburn, Lionel Stander, William Frawley, Thurston Hall, Cora Witherspoon, Sterling Holloway, Mary Lou Lender, Spencer Charters, Montague Love, Etienne Girardot, Christian Rub, Guinn Williams, Ward Bond, Irving Bacon.

ONE hour and a half of just good fun. And you can laugh at the fun without losing half of it, for Harold Lloyd, who has everything to say when his pictures are in production, is one of the few screen people in Hollywood who still believe the camera's chief function is not that of photographing two people shouting at each other. His comedy is elemental, is for all ages and all degrees of intelligence—the kind of comedy which leaves laughter unrestrained by virtue of being presented visually. That is getting back to the first principles of screen entertainment. The incompetents who control the film industry departed from the first principles when a machine made it possible for the screen to talk, and now they are making frantic efforts to keep threatening bankruptcy from coming all the way around the corner. They should look at *Professor, Beware!*, listen to the laughter it provokes, and give thought to the restoration of camera to its rightful place in the screen's scheme of cinematic things. There is dialogue in the Lloyd picture, plenty of it, but it is used legitimately to knit together and give logic to the major comedy scenes.

You Have Time to Laugh . . .

ONE of the chief drawbacks of talkie comedies is the impossibility of spacing them for laughs. All audiences do not laugh at the same things, and if spacing were attempted, there would be moments of flatness during the showing in different houses. Harold Lloyd's way of doing things avoids that difficulty. When he and his companions are racing along

the car tops of a freight train to keep from being knocked off by a tunnel which does not provide the proper clearance, you can laugh your head off without losing any of the comedy. And there are a dozen other sequences, big and little, which give you the same privilege. It is the kind of technique upon which the film structure was raised; its abandonment is responsible for the industry's present financial discomfort. Bringing memory to bear on Harold's previous pictures, I cannot recall his having had in recent years a role which fits his individual style of comedy as closely as that which makes him such a continuous joy in *Professor, Beware!* A feature of all his pictures has been their innate niceness, their constant regard for good taste. They are like Harold himself, clean, wholesome, decent; are made for as fine children as his and Mildred's, and for such fine parents as their children have. The name Harold Lloyd is always your assurance that you may take the whole family. He never lets you down.

Come Out of a Huddle . . .

THE story was produced by the huddle system, participants being Delmer Davis, Jack Cunningham, Clyde Bruckman, Crampton Harris, Francis Cockrell and Marian B. Cockrell. It has enough merit to keep credit from becoming too thin when it is stretched over the entire group. Elliott Nugent directed with zest and full appreciation of comedy values. He was given a competent cast, one of its members being Phyllis Welch, an accomplished young woman who makes her initial screen bow. Raymond Walburn and Lionel Stander have important roles. The high standard of the cast is indicated by the names of those who make only brief appearances—William Frawley, Thurston Hall, Cora Witherspoon, Sterling Holloway, Spencer Charters, Montagu Love, Christian Rub being some of the talented players who support the star. Technically the production is in every way satisfactory. Every time I see a picture of the sort, I congratulate myself upon my never allowing anyone to tell me how the bewildering camera effects are produced. Of course, I know that Harold and his companions were not toying with death in the freight-train sequence, but I was thrilled by my belief that they were. I suppose Archie Stout's camera work had something to do with it. All the

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seven purely action sequences which were made entertaining wholly by the camera, required expert photography, and that is what Archie gives us. And Duncan Mansfield, film editor, is entitled to applause for the rapid and smooth pace the picture maintains.

ONE OF THE BETTER ONES . . .

● **THE SHOPWORN ANGEL**; Metro picture and release; produced by Joseph Mankiewicz; director, H. C. Potter; co-stars Margaret Sullavan and James Stewart; screen play by Waldo Salt; based on story by Danna Burnet; musical score by Edward Ward; dances staged by Val Raset; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associate art directors, Joseph Wright and Edwin B. Willis; gowns, Adrian; photographed by Joseph Ruttenberg; montage effects, Slavko Vorkapich; film editor, W. Donn Hayes. Supporting cast: Walter Pidgeon, Hattie McDaniel, Nat Pendleton, Alan Curtis, Sam Levene, Eleanor Lynn, Charles D. Brown.

A BEAUTIFUL story, beautifully told; a picture without a flaw. I wrote, not so long ago, that extended reviews were possible only when the pictures reviewed were imperfect, that reviews grow fat on faults. I already have said about all that one can say about *Shopworn Angel*. It has a Metro production—something else which needs no elaboration. It has a distinctly brilliant bit of screen writing in the script of Waldo Salt, masterly direction by H. C. Potter and great performances by all the members of the cast, at the head of which are two of my greatest favorites, Margaret Sullavan and Jimmie Stewart. The scenes they share in this picture are made acting gems by their very lack of even a suggestion of acting. Margaret plays the shopworn angel and Jimmie a Texas boy en route to the battlefields of France as a soldier in the World War. By a trick of fate, the two meet; some of Jimmie's pals see him with the glamorous girl; he boasts of his acquaintance with her, tells a fanciful tale of their long friendship, and thus the story gets underway.

Jimmie Stewart Makes Good . . .

WHEN Jimmie finds himself in a tight corner and makes a plea to the hardboiled chorus girl to play up to him to save his face with his comrades, we have the first of a series of scenes which will warm the hearts of those who see the picture. Margaret's yielding is recorded in her eyes without even as much physical action as the movement of an eyelash. Jimmie, too, is adept at reading dialogue with his eyes. When he made his first appearance on the screen, I wrote of him (*Spectator*, January 18, 1936): "What interests me in Stewart as a recruit from the stage is his intelligent and immediate grasp of the difference between stage and screen acting. Not in one gesture nor in a line he reads is there the slightest suggestion of the stage. He is a young fellow who will go a long way in pictures." I might now say the same thing about H. C. Potter, who directed *Shopworn Angel*. He is from the stage, but brings none of it to the screen. His work reflects his realization of the camera's status as the screen's storytelling medium, and his direction of dialogue gives it the sincerity it can get only from easy, conversational delivery and not from stage declamation. Potter's

work definitely places him among the screen's top-notch directors.

Camera Plays Its Part . . .

SALT'S script is notable for its reliance on the camera. It contains stumbling speeches, unfinished lines which are completed by fleeting visual expressions which the camera records. Both in the script and direction the camera is played to, and the dialogue is spoken only to reach the microphone. *Shopworn Angel*, in short, is one of the few completely intelligent talkies we have had. It is intensely human, logical and gripping. Walter Pidgeon is third in importance in the cast and gives one of those easy, sincere performances for which he is noted. Hattie McDaniel, the somewhat massive colored comedienne, is at her best. A feature of the production is the big part played in it by the adroit montage work of Slavko Vorkapich. In a rapid succession of interlacing and superimposed scenes, the entrance of America into the World War is sketched to set the atmosphere of the picture; and later we have a series of such shots to show the war itself. The photography of Joseph Ruttenberg and the film editing of Donn Hayes are big contributions to the satisfaction the picture will give.

CRUELTY AS ENTERTAINMENT . . .

● **THE TEXANS**; Paramount; producer, Lucien Hubbard; director, James Hogan; screen play, Bertram Millhauser, Paul Sloane and William Wister Haines; story, Emerson Hough; musical direction, Boris Morros; photographer, Theodore Sparkuhl; editor, LeRoy Stone; songs, Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin. Cast: Joan Bennett, Randolph Scott, May Robson, Walter Brennan, Robert Cummings, Raymond Hatton, Robert Barrat, Harvey Stephens, Francis Ford, Bill Roberts.

ONE that misses. *The Texans* has all the physical ingredients that go into the making of a great outdoor picture, but the story is constructed too loosely to permit it to become great. There is nothing in Jim Hogan's direction to indicate he could not have made a good picture if he had been given a good script, but neither he nor any other director could make entertaining, even with an otherwise good script, a picture which relied for so much of its footage on the mad rushes of hundreds of poor, bewildered cattle. The story is one of driving a herd of ten thousand beef cattle from the Mexican boundary to Kansas just after the close of the Civil War. When beef cattle are driven to market, care always is exercised to keep the pace slow in order that the cattle will be as heavy as possible when they reach their destination. Every time we see the cattle in the picture—a few hundred, not ten thousand—they are in headlong flight. One sequence shows them terrified by a grass fire, the poor creatures rushing madly to escape the flames. There is a scene in which one of them is thrown violently to the ground in front of the camera. All that, my brothers, is presented for your entertainment!

Joan's Gorgeous Attire . . .

ONE would gather from what the screen presents that Paramount was more concerned in making a poor picture than in making a good one. In essence

purely a physical story calling for swift and uninterrupted action, it stops in one place to give a young man time to sing a song, and in another to stage a touching burial service over the remains of a man who had no part in motivating the story. To entitle the burial to play such a prominent part in the picture, audience sympathy for the man must have been developed while he was alive. Such sympathy was not aroused; the character was not important, and the sorrow of his comrades as reflected in the sequence was not shared by the audience, all of which made the sequence rather absurd. Another absurdity is the manner in which the beautiful Joan Bennett is dolled up for the entire length of the picture. She goes through a blizzard, a dust storm, a fight with Indians, the grass fire and the fifteen hundred miles of a tough trip through wild land, without a single hair on her gorgeous blonde head getting one hundredth of an inch out of place. And the variety of her hairdresses is astounding. Equally astounding is her wardrobe. In a part which called for nothing but riding breeches and high boots—or whatever their equivalents were in the period of the picture—Joan appears in a series of gowns which would have graced the ballroom scene in *Marie Antoinette*.

May Robson Can Cough . . .

A *AGAINST* the competition of the picture's physical absurdities and the torturing of the helpless animals, the players could make but little impression with their performances. Joan's get-ups make it impossible for us to accept her as a cattle queen. May Robson is in the picture apparently only to scold the rest of the people in it. In one sad scene we think we are going to lose her; she is very ill, has a bad cough, and all hands are worried about her. The next time we see her she is back on the scolding job. The sick scene is one of the several mysteries included in the production. It establishes the fact that May can cough, but the story connection is not quite clear to me. Randy Scott is as satisfactory in his role as anyone could be. One of the best performances is that of Robert Cummings, a really talented player whom Paramount sadly neglects. Raymond Hatton, one of the old guard who never gives a poor performance, appears to advantage, and Robert Barrat is a particularly menacing menace. Bill Roberts sings nicely the gratuitously inserted song, *Silver on the Sage*, a really fine number written by Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin. It has musical and lyrical merit

which would entitle it to a better setting. Paramount should serve it again in a better picture.

BECOMING A HARDY PERENNIAL . . .

● **LOVE FINDS ANDY HARDY**; Metro picture and release; directed by George B. Seitz; screen play by William Ludwig; from stories by Vivien R. Bretherton; based upon the characters created by Aurania Rouverol; song numbers, "Meet the Beat of My Heart" and "It Never Rains But What It Pours," by Mack Gordon and Harry Revel, "In Between," Roger Edens; vocal arrangements by Roger Edens; musical score by David Snell; recording engineer, Douglas Shearer; Art director, Cedric Gibbons; associate art directors, Stan Rogers and Edwin B. Willis; wardrobe by Jeanne; photographed by Lester White; film editor, Ben Lewis. Cast: Lewis Stone, Mickey Rooney, Cecilia Parker, Fay Holden, Judy Garland, Lana Turner, Ann Rutherford, Mary Howard, Gene Reynolds, Don Castle, Betty Ross Clark, Marie Blake, George Breakston, Raymond Hatton, Frank Darien.

METRO has a winner in this one. The story is about you and me and the people who live next door—just an honest-to-goodness recital of trifling things of importance only to those involved in them. Mickey Rooney is in love, and because Mickey is one of the greatest actors appearing in pictures, he makes us sigh with him and laugh with him—but, most of all, laugh at him. It is not a comedy role he plays, not by a jugful. It is dramatic, and at times becomes tragic. Fate plays a dirty trick on him; brings his own girl back to town just as he is about to take another fellow's girl to the Assembly ball, and he can't raise the eight dollars to complete the purchase of a used car upon which he already has paid twelve dollars. If that is not tragedy, then you and I never were Mickey's age. And if any nations are looking for skilled diplomats to straighten out things in this troubled world, I would like to suggest Judy Garland. By the time the final fade-out comes along she has Mickey sitting high, wide and handsome, his brow unruffled and an end of a grin hanging on each ear.

One For All Ages . . .

OF CHILDREN and enacted principally by children, *Love Finds Andy Hardy* is a picture for children whose ages range all the way from eight to eighty. Anyone too old to be delighted with it has lived in vain. It provokes both roars of laughter and heart-throbs. William Ludwig wrote a brilliant screen play, George Seitz directed it brilliantly, and it presents a series of brilliant performances. If all that will not satisfy your screen appetite, you had better skip it. It is the first of the *Hardy Family* series I have seen, the previews of the previous ones happening on nights when "bigger" pictures were previewed. In the past year I have seen all the big pictures in which the big stars appeared, but I have seen none which was a more unalloyed delight than this modest offering. Mickey is an amazingly clever youngster, and fully as amazing and still more appealing is Judy Garland. The screen has no one else quite like her. Still a child, her talent is ageless, and she can go on and on until she needs the support of a cane to bring her on the set. Lewis Stone, superb actor



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always; Fay Holden, a heart-warming mother; Cecilia Parker, sincere, appealing, make up, with Mickey, a family in whom the whole world will become interested as the series progresses.

GOOD IDEA, GOOD ENTERTAINMENT . . .

● **THE TERROR OF TINY TOWN;** Jed Buell's Midgets in a Principal production; release not set; directed by Sam Newfield; produced by Jed Buell; associates, Abe Meyer and Bert Sternbach; original screen play by Fred Myton; added dialogue by Clarence Marks; story editor, Helen Gurley; photographed by Mack Stengler; assistant director, Gordon S. Griffith; film editors, Martin G. Cohn and Richard G. Wray; songs by Lew Porter and Phil Stern; musical numbers directed by Lew Porter; musical background by Edward Kilenyi. Cast: Billy Curtis, Yvonne Moray, Little Billy, Billy Platt, Johnny Bambury, Joseph Herbst, Charles Becker, Nita Krebs, George Ministeri, Karl Casitzky, Johnny Fern, W. H. O'Docharty.

JED BUELL had a good idea and has realized it handsomely. Midgets interest us because they are so exactly like us in all respects except that of size; but because there are so few of them among so many of us, and so few ordinary occupations available to them, they find the easiest way to make a living is to let us look at them, at so much a look, and that pleases both them and us. Jed's idea was to provide action with the look, so he rounded up a score or more of the little people, had a story written for them, and gives us, in *The Terror of Tiny Town*, one of the most interesting and pleasantly entertaining pictures I have seen in quite a spell of moons. Jed does not present his players as freaks, does not ask us to regard them as anything other than characters in a regular, true-to-type—as a line on the screen terms it—"Rollickin', Rootin', Tootin', Shootin' Drama of the Great Outdoors." Wisely Jed refrained from including anything never before seen in a Western. Therein lies the strength of his picture as entertainment.

Brave Men and Dastardly Villains . . .

WE DO not laugh at these nice little persons. We laugh with them as they strut importantly, and obviously with appreciation of the humor in it, through sets built to standard size and dressed with standard furniture. But the rootin', tootin', shootin' bad men, and the brave and honest guardians of the

law, ride pint-size steeds when they dash madly hither and yon upon their respective missions. And, strangely enough, as you watch them you become interested in the story as a story, view it as standard Western entertainment, wish the really handsome leading man well and fall quite in love with the beautiful heroine. After the preview, Jed, with dignity befitting the occasion, presented me to both of them, Billy Curtis and Yvonne Moray, and I found them a charming pair who with becoming and gracious modesty acknowledged my congratulations. Little Billy—another Billy—makes a dastardly villain, a ruthless killer, and my hisses mingled with the others which bore testimony to the impressiveness of his villainy. All in all, *The Terror of Tiny Town* is good fun, a screen treat you should not miss.

AGAIN THE SILVER SCREAM . . .

● **I'LL GIVE A MILLION;** 20th Century-Fox; associate producer, Kenneth Macgowan; director, Walter Lang; story, Cesare Zavattini and Giaci Mondaini; screen play, Boris Ingster and Milton Sperling; photography, Lucien Andriot; art director, Bernard Herzbrun and David Hall; film editor, Louis Loeffler; costumes, Gwen Wakeling; musical director, Louis Silvers. Cast: Warner Baxter, Marjorie Weaver, Peter Lorre, Jean Hersholt, John Carradine, J. Edward Bromberg, Lynn Bari, Fritz Feld, Sig Rumann, Christian Rub, Paul Harvey, Charles Halton, Frank Reicher, Frank Dawson, Harry Hayden, Stanley Andrews, Lillian Porter, Luis Alberni, Rafaelo Ottiano, Georges Renavent, Rolfe Sedan, Eddie Conrad, Egon Brecher, Frank Puglia, Michael Visaroff, Alez Novinsky, Armand Kaliz.

WHATEVER chance this one had was killed by the treatment given it. Both producer and director seem to have been unaware of the nature of the story material they had on hand. *I'll Give a Million* is a comedy of situations. Warner Baxter, a man of great wealth, tries to get away from it all by changing places with a tramp. That starts a series of complications which compose the screen play, the entertainment being provided by the reaction of the characters to the situations in which they find themselves. The situations themselves providing the comedy, it follows that the characters must be normal, run-of-mill beings, even as you and I, if their reactions are to mean anything to us. In such a story everything except the situations should be normal; a picture made from it should be played seriously to give it universal appeal.

Story Had Possibilities . . .

WITH a story which could have been made extremely amusing and a cast capable of bringing out all its values, *I'll Give a Million* comes to the screen as one of the poorest pictures we have had in a long time. Its locale France, most of the characters scream at one another and carry on in the best traditions of the stage Frenchman, a Frenchman, by the way, whom no one can find in France. The editor of a newspaper is the chief offender. It would have been amusing to witness how a normal editor would handle the situation in which this one found himself, but there was no amusement in the behavior of the ranting imbecile the picture gives us. He serves only

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as an irritation. Newspapermen who view the picture will ask why a flock of photographers was necessary to get a photo of one character for the paper, and why one provincial paper had so many photographers on its staff. There are three normal characters in the picture, Warner Baxter, Jean Hersholt and Peter Lorre, excellent actors, all of them, but sadly wasted in such a badly battered production.

Producers Will Not Learn . . .

AND I would like to know how long Century is going to give us the mature Warner sharing romances with girls who are little more than children. Here he plays opposite Marjorie Weaver, a beginner who showed some promise in a couple of previous pictures, but who here gives a more childish performance than even her lack of years would excuse. But I do not blame her. No doubt she gave Walter Lang, the director, the kind of performance he wanted, but it certainly is not the kind the average audience would want. It is inevitable that among the many pictures Hollywood makes, some by accident will turn out badly, but *I'll Give a Million* seems to have been made bad by design. Surely present box-office conditions throughout the country should have taught producers that there is no market for uproar or for pictures which in other ways reveal their producers' total lack of comprehension of the nature of their medium. But they keep right on making them.

BOB SISK MAKES A GOOD ONE . . .

● **SKY GIANT**; RKO picture and release; produced by Robert Sisk; directed by Lew Landers; story and screen play by Lionel Houser; photography by Nicholas Musuraca, with special effects by Vernon L. Walker; montage by Douglas Travers; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate art director, Al Herman; musical director, Roy Webb; recorded by Theron O. Kellum; edited by Harry Marker; gowns by Renie. Cast: Richard Dix, Chester Morris, Joan Fontaine, Harry Carey, Paul Guilfoyle, Robert Strange, Max Hoffman, Jr., James Bush, Vicki Lester, Edward Marr.

BOB SISK, a chubby chap who started as a newspaperman and went down and down until he became a motion picture producer, has given us in *Sky Giant* an aviation picture which ranks with *Test Pilot* as an entertaining and informative film. Bob apparently was wise enough to recognize that the background would be as interesting as the story. At all events, in his screen play Lionel Houser tells us a great deal about the operation of an aeronautical school in which young fellows are taught to build and fly planes, devoting two or three of the opening reels to it before he gives us any idea of the direction the story is to take. But these opening reels are a story in themselves, one the camera tells in a manner to hold our interest, particularly at a time when Howard Hughes has made us so air conscious. After a while, Houser works his way into the personal story in which flying plays a big part, and rounds off what proves to be a quite satisfactory piece of screen entertainment. Brisk dialogue is a commendable feature of Houser's script.

Joan Fontaine Coming Along . . .

THE ageless Richard Dix, as young looking now as he was a dozen years ago, heads a cast selected with discretion by Sisk. Chester Morris shares a romance with Joan Fontaine, even though she, for some reason I failed to get, marries Dix, who later proposes annulment of the marriage and hands her back to Morris to provide a logical ending. The three principals turn in good performances. The two men long since have established their right to recognition as accomplished actors; Joan, still young in both years and screen experience, surprises with the smooth maturity she displays. When she first appeared on the screen I predicted a bright career for her, but I did not expect her to come along quite so fast. She displays marked intelligence in her reading of lines and understanding of the significance of her scenes. She is a young woman who seems to be going places. Another performance that is outstanding is that of Paul Guilfoyle, whose work in *Winterset* always will be one of my agreeable screen memories. Harry Carey, capable veteran, is another who makes good.

Lew Landers Directs Ably . . .

DIRECTION by Lew Landers is notable for the restraint and understanding it displays. He gives us the impression that the story is telling itself. The characters speak in easy, conversational tones which make the picture easy to listen to. To avoid reaching perfection in one jump, Lew permits his leading characters to exchange confidences on a dance floor loud enough for all the other dancers to hear what is said, a device practically all directors resort to to remind us that, after all, we are viewing a motion picture, not real life. It seems odd, however, that in all such scenes the leading characters are the only dancers who have anything to say. There are many thrilling flying scenes in the picture as well as interesting and comprehensive views of interiors of airplane factories. Such scenes demanded skilled photography, and Nick Musuraca responded ably. Special photographic effects by Vernon Walker and montage by Douglas Travers also add greatly to the visual strength of the production. Editing such a film was no easy task, but Harry Marker performed it in a highly creditable manner. All in all, in producing *Sky Giant*, chubby Bob Sisk did mighty well. But will he tell me who or what played the name part?

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IS HECTIC WITH COMEDY . . .

● **FOUR'S A CROWD**; Warner Bros.; executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, David Lewis; director, Michael Curtiz; screen play, Casey Robinson and Sig Herzig; original story, Wallace Sullivan; photographer, Ernie Haller; assistant director, Sherry Shourds; film editor, Clarence Kolster; sound, Robert B. Lee; art director, Max Parker; dialogue director, Irving Rapper; gowns by Orry-Kelly; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein. Cast: Errol Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, Rosalind Russell, Patric Knowles, Walter Connolly, Hugh Herbert, Melville Cooper, Franklin Pangborn, Herman Bing, Margaret Hamilton, Joseph Crehan, Joe Cunningham, Dennie Moore, Gloria Blondell, Carole Landis, Reine Riano.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

GAY and romping. From the moment when Errol Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, Rosalind Russell and Patric Knowles come parading onto the screen arm in arm, in full evening dress and jocund mood, to create one of the smartest and most arresting title backgrounds we have seen in a long time—from then on things never stop happening. One complication follows another; in fact, there are so many that one is rather at a loss to untangle the action in morning-after retrospection. But the succession of intrigues and counter-intrigues in which the characters indulge, make for fast action and some capital comedy situations. If the bounds of credibility are reached now and then, this is a license of high comedy. The spectator finds himself devouring the remarkable developments with relish. The whole spirit of the picture is playful and nonsensical, and this spirit is so infectious that one feels it is nice to be foolish on occasion.

Romantic Actor At His Best . . .

ERROL FLYNN gives his best comedy performance to date. As an unscrupulous publicity agent, who uses as tools all the other characters in his effort to secure an unpopular multi-millionaire as his client, Flynn is more subtle, expressive, and convincing than he has ever been before. His scene in which he endeavors to talk into two telephones at once, on each line being a young woman who believes herself to be the object of his affections, and to make both of them think he is talking intermittently to a business client, was accomplished with real trouping and drew a round of applause from the audience. Both of the leading feminine players make deviations in the types of parts in which they are usually seen. Olivia de Havilland appears as a sophisticated, somewhat sirenish heiress, and imbues the part with much allure and charm in the quieter moments and considerable sock in the vigorous ones. Fact is, she socks one of the gentlemen a good one on the chin.

Camera Used With Fluency . . .

AROLE with more definite character traits and of somewhat greater length sets Rosalind Russell off to very good advantage. She is a newspaper woman in the story, and she has caught the psychology of the press woman pretty fully, playing with convincing proportions of swagger and grit. Most of the serious moments in the play fall to her, and she handles them like an actress of excellent background.

Patric Knowles, as the other member of the quartet, a rather slow-witted newspaper manager, contributes a well punctuated comedy performance. Director Michael Curtiz has kept all of the characters individual and vivid. And he has told the story with a good deal of originality and wit. The camera he uses with uncommon fluency. There is a tickling scene in which two of the characters have been seated behind a large pillar at a night club, and the camera moves back and forth across the wide obstacle, catching first one and then the other person trying to peer out from behind it.

Technical Workers Imaginative . . .

COMING to Curtiz's assistance with imaginative work are Ernie Haller, photographer; Max Parker, art director; and Leo F. Forbstein, in charge of music. I wish I knew what the tinkling but bracing music was that the latter employed in the opening sequence, when Miss Russell, full of high spirits, comes into the press room, and then moves from one party to another full of consternation when told the paper is closing down. The music accompanies her when she walks, stops when she starts to talk. A clever photographic stunt is the scene where Flynn is shown talking over the phones to the two amorous women, the three of them forming a triangle in the same shot, connected by telephone wires. Strikes me Clarence Kolster has done a smooth job of editing, too.

Film Has a Spell . . .

AMONG the other players Walter Connolly is outstanding as the gruff and eccentric multi-millionaire, and Hugh Herbert lends some of his always-dependable humor as a minister in closing sequences. Melville Cooper, Herman Bing and Margaret Hamilton are comedians also in good fettle. Young Gloria Blondell makes a brief appearance in one scene, looking strikingly like her sister. Though the part is not of sufficient length to reveal her capability, what she did reflected competence. Probably some of the characters and situations in the film, the screen play of which was by Casey Robinson and Sig Herzig, would drip a few drops of the proverbial water, but the piece nevertheless has a spell, and in all likelihood you will deem it a good evenings' entertainment.

FILMLAND AGAIN GETS THE LAUGH . . .

● **THE AFFAIRS OF ANNABEL**; RKO production and release; produced by Lou Lusty; director, Ben Stoloff; screen play by Bert Granet and Paul Yawitz; story by Charles Hoffman; musical director, Roy Webb; photography by Russell Metty; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate art director, Al Herman; gowns by Renie; edited by Jack Hively. Cast: Jack Oakie, Lucille Ball, Ruth Donnelly, Bradley Page, Fritz Feld, Thurston Hall, Elisabeth Risdon, Granville Bates, James Burke, Lee Van Atta, Anthony Warde, Leona Roberts.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

THERE is fun in *The Affairs of Annabel* if one approaches it with a measure of indulgence. Jack Oakie and Lucille Ball carry on with a good deal of vigor and piquancy in their roles of an over-imagin-

ative press agent and a temperamental motion picture star. The story is something of a satire on Hollywood, and though a few of the gags have grown a little fuzz about the chin, numerous new-born and very saucy ones rear their heads to give "the bird" at the film citadel. The plot itself has an element of novelty. It seems that the press agent has a penchant for thinking up real-life situations for the star to place herself in—spending a week in a department store or in jail—so that she can get background for a forthcoming role and also render him an opportunity for publicity stories. The latter do not always jell. At the opening of the film she has spent thirty days at hard labor in a prison, because the publicist, though he had gotten her in with facility, finds difficulty in getting her out. Later he inveigles her into becoming a maidservant in a household, gangsters take over the household as a hide-out, and a really colossal publicity story results.

Just Look the Other Way . . .

WHERE the indulgence of the spectator will be most needed are at the spots where holes so big appear in the story, that it is a wonder the actors do not fall through them. They don't though; they step around them and go on playing with such animation that one's attention is very much distracted from the chasms. The biggest hole results from the fact that no one ever recognizes the screen star, whether she is laboring in jail or being driven about the city by the gangsters. An endeavor is made to cover this fictional cavity by the thin veil of having the actress attempt to convince the gangsters and others of her identity by showing them pictures of herself in a magazine, and having the others yet refuse to believe her. Our only reply, of course, is that we'll take vanilla. Nevertheless, Director Ben Stoloff has put such comedy spirit and good pace into the film, that one finds it easy to overlook the improbabilities in the story.

Comedian Presents New Figure . . .

OAKIE fans will have a pleasant surprise in the stream-lined—well, almost—appearance of the comedian, who has lost a considerable quantity of avoirdupois and looks very much as he did several years ago, before the inflation set in. Lucille Ball is seen to better advantage than in any of her recent parts. Many of her scenes reveal a deft and subtle comedy style. Ruth Donnelly, Bradley Page and Fritz Feld do clever trouping in important parts. Audiences will be pleased to meet young Lee Van

Atta, evidently a lad of no little theatrical experience, who gets some of the best laughs as a school boy in whom the actress-maidservant inspires the first pangs of love, and whose amorous declarations are complicated by a changing voice, which jumps to a treble now and then. The show has been given a first-rate technical production. The sets are spacious and cheery, the photography good.

SORROW BY THE SHOVELFUL . . .

● **LITTLE TOUGH GUY**; Universal picture and release; directed by Harold Young; associate producer, Ken Goldsmith; screen play by Gilson Brown and Brenda Weisberg; original story by Brenda Weisberg; photographed by Elwood Bredell; art director, Jack Otterson; associate art director, N. V. Timchenko; film editor, Philip Cahn; musical director, Charles Previn. Cast: Robert Wilcox, Helen Parrish, Marjorie Main, Jackie Searle, Peggy Stewart, Helen MacKellar, Ed Pawley, Olin Howland, Pat C. Flick, Billy Halop, Huntz Hall, Gabriel Dell, Bernard Punsley, Hally Chester, David Gorcery.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

WHEN the hand of tragedy strikes, it really strikes, no foolin'. And what's more, life is hard and bitter. Especially for the under-dog, poor fellow. Here is a New York family living peaceful and respectable like, when the father gets into a brawl at a strike and is sent to the electric chair for murder; and innocent too—or did he really kill the policeman accidentally? No matter. Things just go from bad to worse. Little Johnny is shunned like the plague by all his pals, big sister is fired without just cause from her job and has to become a pony in a cheap burlesque show to buy food for her mother and brother, and the three of them must move to a wretched dive in the slums. Of course, they might have appealed to the good old W.P.A., but the mother is lazy and slatternly, and the daughter probably feels she can buy more food by working in the burlesque. Anyhow, things keep on going from bad to worse, and little Johnny, really a nice kid, soon ends up a hoodlum, ready to shoot it out with the police. What did you expect, living in the slums? And whose fault is it, inferentially? Yours and yours; though you partly redeem yourself at the finish of the picture, because of the fine reformatory you have provided, where Johnny and his cohorts are on the way to becoming model citizens. Well, this is what *Little Tough Guy* is all about. There may be audiences who will lap it up. I fear I could not take it seriously.

Youthful Actor Registers . . .

FOR the average spectator the *Dead End Kids* probably will be the most appreciated element in the picture. They fill the screen with a great deal of spontaneity and action. Much of their buffoonery is out of key with the tragic tone set by most of the picture, but it is more agreeable than the shoveled-on misery. Outstanding in the picture is Billy Halop, playing Johnny, a young actor of exceptional ability. One may not find the character he is essaying wholly convincing, but it must be admitted that the boy has moments of poignancy and of considerable dramatic force. A scene in which he is trapped in a

Eyes Examined and Glasses Fitted

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grocery store by the police, and, terrified but defiant, chooses to shoot it out with them, is really rather gripping. Harold Young's direction, incidentally, seems to be most effective in the highly dramatic scenes.

Cast Is Competent . . .

OF THE other players Marjorie Main gives one of her best screen performances to date, reflecting a much greater knowledge of the camera than in some previous appearances. Helen MacKellar is capital in an irrelevant part of a humorous slum woman, and little Peggy Stewart brings sensitiveness and understanding to her role. Helen Parrish has poise and a good voice, but she lacks sufficient preparation for the taxing part of the daughter, and does not realize all its possibilities. Robert Wilcox is likable as her sweetheart, and Jackie Searle and Ed Pawley give good accounts of themselves. Several of Photographer Elwood Bredell's "pan" shots are very effective. The number of films on sociological themes to come from Hollywood in recent months is an encouraging sign, but those which do not ring true, which are biased and fabricated and dubious as to a desire really to say anything, can lessen the power of more significant films to arouse the public conscience to a need for social reform.

GRAND ARMY OF REPUBLIC . . .

● **ARMY GIRL**; Republic; producer, Sol Siegel; director, George Nicholls; screen play, Barry Trivers and Samuel Ornitz; story, Charles Clifford; photographers, Harry Wild and Ernest Miller; editor, William Morgan; musical score, Victor Young. Cast: Madge Evans, Preston Foster, Neil Hamilton, Ruth Donnelly, H. B. Warner, Heather Angel, James Gleason, Ralph Morgan, Barbara Pepper, Billy Gilbert, Ralph Byrd, Guinn Williams, Robert Warwick, Allen Vincent.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

A DOZEN salvos of applause for Republic's latest cinematic venture into the province of the Army. The first of this dozen because Script Writers Barry Trivers and Samuel Ornitz breathed a freshness into a well-worn theme, the story of army life in an outpost encampment. Applause, too, because the story sticks to its knitting and steers away rather sharply from flag waving and huzzahing. At first blush it may be difficult to conjecture why the review is so lavish in its praise on the score of originality. The point is that service stories are usually pretty much the same. But not *Army Girl*. Recounting the story of how the Washington War Office mechanized cavalry outposts in the person of brash Captain Dike

Conger, the narrative has newness. Dike Conger and his assistant, Three Star Hennessey, outmaneuver a border patrol cavalry unit. This means that Colonel Armstrong, the fort commander for thirty years, must be replaced by younger and newer men. The horses, long personal favorites of the men, must go too.

Theme Not Hackneyed . . .

ADD romance in the person of the colonel's daughter, complete the triangle with righteous, punctilious suitor Neil Hamilton, and there are all the ingredients for a rip-roaring yarn. The direction by George Nicholls, Jr., leaves little to be desired. Charges that this one of the smaller companies skimps on its footage is here eloquently answered. Director Nicholls used his camera effectively, displayed excellent taste in his change of pace. To me one of the most thrilling camera moments came in the spectacular gymkhana between the baby tank and the cavalry riders. Some time ago a writer asked Editor Beaton what could be done to make Westerns a little different, one from the other. The editor suggested making the horses walk instead of run. He should have gotten his view of how speed can be used effectively for a length of time without becoming repetitious.

Cast Excellent . . .

THERE is no better indication of the quality and magnitude of this, Republic's biggest venture, than the size and names in the cast. Leading is Madge Evans who gives a finely shaded performance. Mr. Moto and Charlie Chan are hereby commissioned to find out why Madge Evans isn't assigned the parts she so obviously deserves. For my money she is still one of the best Hollywood names. Preston Foster was never better. Given the kind of role that might have become hammy in less capable hands, he breathed reality into it. Neil Hamilton was excellent as the outpost prig, and Ruth Donnelly her old self as the outpost gossip. Hats off to Jimmie Gleason as Foster's mechanic. And a hand to Billy Gilbert as the (shh) Greek proprietor of a Mexican cantina. H. B. Warner gives a poignant performance as the post commander, forced to retire when cocky Foster not only proves the superiority of tanks over horses for border patrol, but also wins the post command from him. His careful performance was telling and real. Ralph Byrd, Guinn Williams, Ralph Morgan, Heather Angel and Barbara Pepper were excellent in other roles.

Production Values Abundant . . .

ARMY GIRL is big in every respect. Entertainment is packed in from the first moment until the last. There is nothing haphazard about the production. Nothing more clearly indicates the thoroughness with which Associate Producer Armand Schaefer went to work than the presence of a musical score by Victor Young, running almost throughout the length of the picture. The race described above became even more stirring with Young's vibrant music. The



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musical motif used in the opening sequences as well as throughout the picture, trumpets set against the roll of drums, had a military air that was colorful and well set the mood. Unfortunately my command of music is limited, and music is Dr. Ussher's province. I am sure, however, that he would concur with me that music made a good picture better. Photography by Harry Wild and Ernest Miller was clear. Some of the shots were majestic in their scope. Film Editor William Morgan did a fine job in editing, makes *Army Girl* hum along in the tempo it should. I believe with *Army Girl* the "stigma" of "independent" becomes a high compliment. Let the biggies take a trip out to the Valley to see how good pictures can be made under a two million dollar budget.

CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by
RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD
of
MABEL KEEFER

FRANK CAPRA, it is said, believes a director cannot make a good picture unless he can make the actors like him. Mr. Capra's realization of this truth undoubtedly has an important bearing on his success as a director. If all business and industry could be brought to recognize how important it is to consider the human element in all transactions, the wheels would run much more smoothly. The man who is considerate and fair in his dealings with his associate workers or those under him, and has the ability to make them like him, is an asset to any concern in any line of business. On the other hand, the man—particularly one in authority—who antagonizes those who work with or for him, is a decided liability.

* * *

REMEMBERING that in his review of *Four Answers to a Maiden's Prayer*—oh, dear me, no! *Four Men and a Prayer*—Mr. Beaton said that Loretta Young's clothes occupied his attention to the exclusion of the meaning of the scene, I was interested to hear a young girl complaining that she occasionally missed some of the action because she was looking to see what Loretta Young would wear next. She resented having her attention distracted from what she considered a very good story. Personally, I do not remember much about Loretta Young's clothes. My attention seems to have been focused on that most attractive bunch of masculinity—the four men.

* * *

THAT very fine picture, *Three Comrades*, seems to have left its impress on this community; everyone is quietly enthusiastic about it. Some young men were particularly impressed with the character of Otto as played by Franchot Tone. But the fly in the ointment, for me, was the music at the very end. I was under the spell of that beautiful scene showing the two friends starting on their way, with the shades

of the other two walking beside them, when there came an awful blast of vocal music. Whether it was the fault of the local sound-operator, I do not know, but the shrill quality of the voices seemed to indicate that some of the fault might lie in the recording, although the few measures of the *Ave Maria*, earlier in the picture, were beautifully done. At any rate, my recollection of an ending that promised to be very lovely to remember, is spoiled.

* * *

SEVERAL weeks ago, Editor Beaton suggested that the names of the cast of the picture being shown, and the parts they play, be displayed in some manner in the theatre lobby. Since then I have heard many people express dissatisfaction because the names of the actors are thrown on the screen at the beginning of the picture. If Mr. Beaton's suggestion were adopted, it would add to the interest of those of us who like to check up on the players who have impressed us, and would save time in the running of the picture.

* * *

SIGHTSEEING bus conductors in New York are soliciting business in a low tone of voice, rather than run the risk of a court summons for loud talking. Hm-m. . . . Three guesses as to what I am thinking.

* * *

LISTENING in on comments made about *Jezebel*, I find that although the story is not so well liked, the general verdict is that it is an excellent piece of work. I sometimes think that the film industry would be amazed if it knew to what a great extent good workmanship counts with the rank and file of cinema patrons.

* * *

SOMETHING else for me to worry about: I have just read, "Society, advanced as it pretends to be, still frowns on the lone female wolf." Ah, me! . . .

* * *

BOXOFFICE prints an item saying that in Japan, the Samuel Goldwyn production, *Woman Chases Man*, will be called, *The Woman Who Climbs a Tree*. That seems to be quite all right because, so often, the woman who chases man finds herself up a tree.

* * *

BRITISH producers should consider King Alfred as a film subject. It is generally conceded that English civilization began with Alfred—that he was the first English gentleman. His victory over the encroaching Danes, and their acceptance of Christianity; the baptism of Guthrum the Danish King, for whom Alfred stood sponsor; the two armies that had fought each other working together at road-making and draining the marshes—surely there is a wealth of screen material in the story of this man, of whom it is said that patience, kindness, courage, good cheer and desire for fair play were his, plus.

* * *

NEWREELS are run too fast. At least they are in this town.

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

La Reine de France . . .

THERE is much music in the score which Herbert Stothart wrote for MGM's *Marie Antoinette*. It is a careful and finely appropriate score, but I expected more in the manner of "period" music. It is not essentially a "French" score, but it fits the situations and the historic era. It would be practically impossible to keep it, should I say, completely in the idiom of Mozart or Haydn. The composer, serving a production of an historic subject so far removed in terms of years as this one is from today, can hardly help but resort occasionally to the music of today in scenes when he does more than illustrate an action. When he psychologizes or comments, when he expresses a foreboding, he speaks, more or less, the language of today, because fear, love, hate, in short all the fundamental emotions, have not changed much as far as elementary aspects and utterance are concerned. At certain ages in the world's history, people died more gracefully, just as they lived more handsomely than at others. But that, too, varies with the character of the individual and, to an extent, also with his social station. Of course, had Mr. Stothart been writing an opera instead of a film score, he might have been able to say his all in the language of Gluck. However, he was arranging film music, and in the year 1938, and for a film public of that year.

A Subtle Problem . . .

IT WILL be impossible to do more than single out a few of the more significant tonal episodes in so long a work. Planning to miss the newsreel, so as to save time, I did not avoid diving champions or champion hog-callers, but Stothart's overture, not having received any advance information regarding the score. The overture was almost noisy enough (as to reproduction) to keep the large Carthay Circle Theatre audience from keeping up an animated conversation, but the human species turns bulldog when it comes to out-talking music, and particularly so, when that music happens to be an overture in a theatre. If I were a dictator I would have dictaphones installed in the back of every seat, and then have recorded what men and women think they absolutely must say to each other in those few moments before or while the house lights go down or have been dimmed. What a contribution to human psychology such a mass-recording would afford! I thought it a fine touch, Stothart's emphatic "intonation"—or might I call it a sub-tonation, to coin a word—when Marie Antoinette declares, "I will be Queen of France." It is music of catastrophic portent and turns almost with the snarl of a beast of fate into a harshly festive welcome of fanfares and bells.

Many Fine Touches . . .

ONE of the best scenes was the royal wedding music in the cathedral. After this impressive and well managed conglomeration of sounds, the sad intimacy of disillusion of young Marie Antoinette,

married to a neurasthenic, loveless husband who suffers from an emotional persecution complex, too, was deftly conveyed. To bring music into this gentle, and yet emotionally stark dialogue, was far from easy. To keep music from becoming obtrusive when a phrase of sound starts in the midst of such a scene, that is difficult and Stothart handled things sensitively. He builds from background music, that is to say from a few notes into a fully articulate tone background for a fast-paced scene, such as the "I am the Daughter of Maria Theresa" into the court ball music. The latter again was well contrasted by that for the artists's ball. The garden music, again that for the gaming house, or that for another court ball—when a Beethoven-like minute was oddly "arranged"—these were notable moments. Stothart often emphasizes two primary moods, desire for love, or a search for happiness, and disillusion. The outpouring of Fersen's admiration, the queen's realization of her impending betrayal by the Duke, the death music for the former king, the prison episodes, again that last meeting with Fersen must be singled out too, not to forget the historic drums sawing like a slow knife through the last life strands of the French monarchy, all these have been "underwritten" aptly in the score. Mr. Stothart and MGM are to be felicitated.

CBS Honors Bennett . . .

LOS ANGELES radio stations and newspapers belling at loggerheads, Composer Robert Russell Bennett, under contract with RKO, did not receive justified publicity prior to the national radio-premiere of his "Eight Etudes for Symphony Orchestra." This suite had been commissioned by the Columbia Broadcasting System and constitutes a well merited recognition of this American composer. At this writing, I can mention only the titles of the eight short pieces, all of which require half an hour to perform. The titles take the form of dedications. They are typical of Mr. Bennett's tendencies and taste, both admirable and engagingly amusing. Thus the dedications read: 1. To Walter Damrosch. 2. To Aldous Huxley (Bennett's favorite philosopher). 3. To Noel Coward (the composer appreciates an ingenious showman when he meets him). 4. To Carl Hubbel (not as I assumed, the famous astronomer, but as R. R. B. informed with his gentle sardonic guffawing, the ace pitcher of the National League). 5. To all dictators (how R. R. B. must have enjoyed composing this musical Shanghai-gesture). 6. To the Grand Lama (quite fictitious a personage, but quite proper a contrast in its serene mood). 7. To Eugene Speicher (Mr. Bennett's favorite portrait painter). 8. To all ladies (Bennet, the would-be-cynic, but at heart a feminist and a gentleman).

Some Bits of News . . .

GREGORY STONE, staff composer at Paramount, has been engaged to write the music score for Max

Reinhardt's "Faust" production at the former Pilgrimage Theatre. Stone had to do some nimble composing, because the production opens August 15 and the "Herr Professor" is quite particular about die Musik. Stone has also more than a chance of having a musical play, based on the life of Liszt, produced by the Shuberts. In fact, they have signed an option. All that is necessary is more production money. Proper credit is due Frederick Kovert, whose handsome and expressive baritone voice is heard in the *Marie Antoinette* film. Kovert should go a long way because he has the voice and sings well also from a standpoint of tone-production and recording.

CAMERA ANGLES

By Robert Joseph

GOOD HUMOR . . .

SOME time ago Milton Berle acted as mc for the *Citizen-News Strike* show. He aisled 'em and he floored 'em, and the Breakfast Club's rafters re-echoed with the constant surge of laughter that greeted his sallies. Now Hollywood is pretty caloused, and when comedians can laugh at another comedian then he must be good. I would like to see Jack Benny laugh at one of Fred Allen's gags. The point is, Milton Berle has something that his home studio, RKO, has not been able to find yet; the ability to entertain. Berle is one of a type. A Broadway player, he came to Hollywood to make pictures. He fell flatter than an off-key trombone. Yet he can still roll 'em in the aisles. The fault lies with his material, a fact so obvious it needs no further discussion.

Prophet Without Honor . . .

LIKE many another personality Milton Berle has been damned and cramped by decidedly inferior material. *New Faces* was one of last season's finest filmic fiascos. A recital of the title of pictures in which he has appeared would add to the list. Presently he plans to return to New York and do a show. He will click; he will be sensational, and then he will come back at a better salary. His return should at least bring with it the prospect of better material. Personal likes and dislikes discounted, Mae West went to New York and outshone Thomas Dewey. When she returns her reception will be a Roman Holiday with "I told you soes" strewn along the path. Milton Berle as a type is box-office poison. But not because of any personal drawbacks; because of material.

Where the Fault Lies . . .

FOR my own part I believe this. I think that RKO confused the two dramatic techniques of radio and screen. It is fairly elemental that the camera and the microphone are two distinctly different instruments of recording impressions; that each requires a special kind of technique. Broadway actors who come to Hollywood heralded as new screen finds; radio stars

are shielded from the fact that screen art and the other two arts are allied but not the same. It seems a pity that talent such as Berle's has to be wasted on the kind of drivel that has been thrown his way; more a pity, too, that a prophet is without honor only in his own land.

THIS HOLLYWOOD

By Bert Harlen

SOMETHING NEW SEEN EACH TIME . . .

THREE times now at preview showings I have seen the concluding sequences of *Snow White*. And each time I have seen something I had not seen before, some engagingly impish little thing that Dopey does or an amusing bit of byplay between two or more of the animals. This attribute of ever presenting something new to the spectator is a characteristic of art, my friends. The average motion picture quite satisfies us the first time we see it; we feel that we have gotten everything the picture has to give. A second screening may reveal some movement in a group which did not attract our attention before, but nothing of any intrinsic entertainment value or contributing anything to the story. This is because the incidental action, and often the performances of the central characters, are visualized by the director and actors in only a loose way, a "let it work itself out" fashion, before the shooting begins. Much of the movement and speech is not fully conceived; that is to say, it is not intricately thought out with relation to what significance it may have as commentary on character or in furthering the mood or meaning of the story.

New Critical Term Suggested . . .

IN *Snow White* all movements and sounds have been vividly and intricately conceived beforehand. The picture encompasses a wealth of picturizing, meaningful details. Thus, subsequent viewings of it not only present us pleasurable bits of action which we had overlooked before, but the viewings increase our appreciation of the characters and story as wholes. Because of this fact the picture will be assured of audiences for a long time to come, perhaps even after greater technical advances have dated it. As good a definition of art as any is that *art is selected significance*. Motion picture critical theory could use a new term—something like "picturization" would sound good—which would denote the presence in a film of fully conceived, significant movement and sound. With respect to this "picturization," of course, not only *Snow White*, but cartoon films in general, are far ahead of real-life motion pictures, which have only begun to compose their elements in any very meaningful way. That is the principal reason why the cartoons are so popular, having practically forced the shorter real-life comedies off the screen.

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A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—August 6, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 14

New Era Is Dawning

...

Activity in the Law Courts, Inactivity
in Box-offices Forcing Film Industry
To Adopt Long Needed Reforms

...

Day of Fantastic Salaries
Definitely on the Way Out

...

... REVIEWS ...

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION ★ THE CROWD ROARS ★ MOTHER CAREY'S CHICKENS
BOY MEETS GIRL ★ GARDEN OF THE MOON ★ THE CHASER ★ MEET THE GIRLS
MR. MOTO'S LAST WARNING ★ BULLDOG DRUMMOND IN AFRICA ★ GIVE ME A SAILOR
I'M FROM THE CITY ★ A DESPERATE ADVENTURE ★ PAINTED DESERT ★ GATEWAY
IN OLD MEXICO

I Hope You Will Like
"Little Miss Broadway"
SHIRLEY TEMPLE



“TRADE WINDS”

A

TAY GARNETT

Production for
Walter Wanger



JOHN CROMWELL

Directed

“ALGIERS”



From the EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

BLAH, BLAH, BLAH + BLAH . . .

ONE of the nice things about the kick in the stomach the Department of Justice has given film industry is that it all is just good, clean fun. Will Hays is delighted; Joe Schenck, interviewed abroad, says it is an entirely friendly suit; Sid Kent is grateful to the government for coming to his assistance in effecting reforms his self-regulation plan was about to tackle. Will Hays expressed his delight by hastening to Hollywood, holding heads of executives within the circle of his arms and whispering violently at them, pausing now and then only long enough to tell the press what a perfectly lovely thing it is that those cute fellows in the Department of Justice are doing to the film industry. None of the film barons seems to see any coincidence in the fact that at the moment the industry's most spectacular production deals with a revolution in course of which a lot of hitherto important heads were chopped off.

* * *

REVOLUTION IS IMPENDING . . .

SOMETHING greater than the anti-trust laws of the United States is shaping the course the American film industry is going to take. The law of reason, of common sense, is asserting itself. Legal action instituted by the Department of Justice is but an incident in the revolution which is going to shake the present cinematic kings off their thrones. Another incident is the action taken by a Metro stockholder who has asked the courts to find out why a small group of the company's executives, in course of a few years, should divide thirty million dollars between them in the form of salaries and bonuses. A third incident is the unanimous decision of the United States District Court for North Dakota in upholding the statute which makes unlawful the operation of any motion picture theatre in that state controlled by any producer or distributor of motion pictures. Independent exhibitors in several other states have been waiting the decision in the North Dakota case before instituting similar actions in their own states. And while the courts are dealing with two of the greatest obstacles in the forward progress of motion pictures—block booking and excessive salaries—the public is doing its share in making successful the revolution which will purge the screen of other ills from which it is suffering.

Describing Downward Curve . . .

WITH the world abundantly provided with outlets for Hollywood's product, thus making available the most extensive market any industry has for its wares; with perfection attained in every conceivable mechanical device essential to the manufacture of pictures, and with financial resources ample for commanding the services of the best brains in the world, the industry's cash receipts are steadily describing a downward curve while general business conditions are growing better. Screen entertainment has more intimate relationship with the public than any other product controlled at its source by a handful of men working in close cooperation. Thus the public knows more about motion pictures as a medium of entertainment than it knows about any other one product as an article of commerce. If the film industry's selling methods are just and equitable, if the great salaries and bonuses paid by the industry are justified by the returns from the expenditure, at least stationary, if not constantly increasing, box-office receipts would establish them as facts. Box-office receipts are neither stationary nor increasing. Now let us see what the public's intimate knowledge of its likes and dislikes has led it to conclude about the progress Hollywood is making in turning out screen entertainment which depends for its cash receipts upon the degree of esteem the public has for it.

What the Survey Shows . . .

FORTUNE magazine made a survey, covering the entire nation, to find out how the public would answer this question: "What has gone ahead the fastest in giving the public what it wants—moving pictures, automobiles, air transport or radio broadcasting?" It was made plain that the question did not refer to mechanical improvements, the survey being merely an effort to determine the degree of public esteem the four things had earned by the progress each has been making. When we consider what the film industry pays the brains it employs and the complete mechanical equipment it possesses, as well as its intimate touch with the public and its unequalled power to stir the emotions of its customers, we, naturally would expect motion pictures to head Fortune's list when the replies to its question are tabulated. They are tabulated in the August issue of the magazine. Motion pictures are at the foot of

the list. Among those questioned, 43.1% thought automobiles led in giving the public what it wants; 29.2% favored radio broadcasting, 9.8% air transport, 9.5% motion pictures, and 8.4% had no answer. I quote *Fortune*: "Analysis of the answers shows that air travel outranks movies in the approval of each economic level—except the Negroes—even including the poor whose chances of flying are nearly nil. Women and oldsters, still cautious of the hazards of flight, also give the movies a slight edge upon airplanes, but very slight. And only one part of the country, Hollywood's own Pacific Coast, gives the pictures any appreciable preference—14.9% as against 10.3% for air transport. Let Hollywood look to its laurels."

Howard Dietz to the Rescue . . .

A FEW years ago Will Hays had a favorite line: "No story ever presented on the screen was half as dramatic as the story of the screen itself." As Will wore it out by too constant use, I would like to suggest something to take its place: No comedy ever presented on the screen was half as goofy as the screen's own efforts to cure its ailments. Under date of July 15, the Hays organization sent out this bit of publicity: "A meeting was held today at the office of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, attended by the presidents of the companies, sales managers, directors of advertising and publicity, and theatre heads. Discussed and formulated were preliminary plans for a concerted effort by the motion picture industry to bring to the public's attention the impressive array of important pictures being prepared for early showing." A short time after this momentous announcement was made Howard Dietz landed in Hollywood, rounded up the local publicity boys, and announced that one million dollars was to be spent in promoting a "back to the movie theatre" movement. The goofy part of it is that not one of the executives gathered around the Will Hays table nor one of the whooper-uppers clustered around Howard Dietz, has any idea of the nature of the ailment he is called upon to give his assistance in curing.

Going Back a Few Years . . .

ONE of my own platitudes is that nothing can happen to the film industry which could not have been anticipated. I have said that several times in these columns. Five years ago (*Spectator*, July 8, 1933) I had this to say: "That the industry will be subjected to a rigid investigation is inevitable. The flagrant disregard of the interests of stockholders in the various companies, the diversion to executives, in the form of unearned, excessive salaries and bonuses, of monies which should go to the stockholders as dividends, cannot go on forever. The smell will become too great." That will cover the legal entanglement of Metro executives. In the same issue you will find: "Block booking is dishonest in that it is a device to force on the exhibitor pictures he would not purchase of his own free will. It is just one of the things which will be remedied during the process

of the industry's regeneration." Washington has started the regenerating process and one of the things it insists upon is the elimination of block booking. In a later *Spectator* (October 28, 1933) I cast some light upon the attitude of President Roosevelt in respect to the picture situation. At the time the Film Code was being discussed, the arrogant film industry was going to tell the President just where he got off, but Roosevelt got in the first blow. "The methods of the big picture companies stink to heaven!" he exclaimed, and the film barons went into a long conference, at the end of which they reached the conclusion that the President was perhaps a teeny-weeny bit opposed to their way of doing business and it would be unwise to ask him for help. I am wondering if he repeated the opinion when the film barons called at the White House a few weeks ago.

Sick Product is the Cause . . .

NOT by all the tom-tom beating of Howard Dietz and his coast-to-coast organization of an "attend the movies" movement, can the box-office be given anything except temporary stimulation. If Dietz knew as much about motion pictures themselves as he does about exploiting them, he would be aware of the reason for the box-office slump and would devote his energy—and save the million dollars—to starting a movement for the application of a cure at the source of the trouble—Hollywood's motion picture studios. It is about nine years ago that I first stated in the *Spectator* that in the long run talking pictures would not sustain a market as steady as that which silent pictures established in spite of block booking and the other trade practices now being blamed for the downward trend of box-office receipts. Trade practices constitute only a skin disease which the film industry is suffering. It is the product that is really ill, and among the enormously paid doctors on production payrolls there is not one with sufficient knowledge to diagnose the case and suggest a cure. The only cure suggested is the injection of more money, and the only result of that is the increased weakness of the patient.

Quality Rising, Receipts Falling . . .

EXHIBITORS place the blame for lowered box-office receipts on what they claim is the poor quality of the pictures Hollywood is turning out. The truth is that the quality of talkie entertainment Hollywood is producing consistently is becoming higher. But it is stage quality, not screen quality—talking pictures, not motion pictures. Not one picture I have seen in years indicates that there is one producer in Hollywood who knows the difference between the two. On studio payrolls there are a few score producers who have proven themselves capable of making talkies of outstanding merit. Today's good talkies, however, are not supporting the market established by the inferior product of a year or two ago; while the quality is going up, box-office receipts are going down. During the thirty-nine weeks ending May 28 this year, Warner Brothers released some of the best pictures they ever made, yet

their profits for that period were \$2,278,267 less than the profits for the corresponding period last year. The financial statements of all the major film corporations show a similar falling off in earnings for the first three-quarters of this year as compared with last year, some running behind as much as forty per cent. And this, mind you, while the exhibitors are charging the major corporations with having all the best of it by virtue of the unfair trade practices they force exhibitors to comply with if they want to keep their houses open.

Grasp Must Be Loosened . . .

DIVORCING production and distribution and putting an end to block booking will be about as efficacious in curing the film industry's ills as would be the application of ointment to a patient's back to cure him of stomach ache. The government's action will have a beneficial effect on the outer rim of the trouble, as the ointment might improve the condition of the skin on the patient's back; but in either case better results could be attained by attacking the trouble at its source. The source is the product. Putting an end to block booking will not send back to theatres the people who are staying away now, nor will divorcing theatre operation and picture production increase box-office receipts. The trouble now is that *the public has grown tired of being told in words how things happen. It wants to see them happen*, as it did when pictures were silent. If it must have talk, it can stay at home and listen to radio broadcasts. The blind stupidity of the small group of men who have the film industry in their grasp, is responsible for all the ills pictures now are suffering. The only remedy is to loosen the grasp, and that is what the government's court actions will do.

Spending Spree Must End . . .

HOLLYWOOD must forget there ever was such an art as that of the theatre. It must establish its own literature and cease paying outrageous sums for stage plays for no other reason than that they have been produced on Broadway. Its spending spree must end. Radio paid \$255,000 for *Room Service*, a stage play, as picture material for the Marx Brothers. When sanity rules production and pictures are made properly, the total cost of a Marx Brothers picture will not reach \$255,000. Hollywood's day in the golden sun is waning. Individual incomes soon will be fixed by services rendered and not by terms of contracts. In the past, the money wasted by executive ignorance has been passed on to the public to absorb, but now the public is refusing to foot the bill, refusing to underwrite four-figure salaries for two-figure services. Abolishing block booking and divorcing production and exhibition will start all the reforms pictures have needed so badly. When the revolution is over and the turmoil it causes has ceased, the envied people will be those with picture knowledge, people who know that the camera, not the microphone, is the screen's true medium of expression, who realize what a help the microphone

can be when kept in its place as a supplementary instrument.

Slumbering Art Will Awaken . . .

ONLY motion pictures can bring lasting and an even level of prosperity to the motion picture industry and those who serve it. All-talking pictures are not motion pictures, and that they cannot carry the load is being demonstrated in today's box-office figures. Only a free-for-all market can inspire production brains. Forcing reforms by court action merely is scratching the surface. But the sound of the scratching will awaken the slumbering art and it will dominate production, will have its day in a sun which will never set. Those pictures whose making will be governed by the dictates of the art, whose makers will realize that the screen is a visual, not an aural, art, will yield rich profits even with the reduced admission prices which will be made possible by the elimination of the dollar which now is wasted in Hollywood for every dollar spent intelligently. There will be unsuccessful pictures, hundreds of them, as there always have been unsuccessful creations of all the other arts, but their makers either will profit by their mistakes or drop out of sight. The revolution will usher in a more cautious day. Spectacles costing millions of dollars will be rare, and the screen will take on that heart-warming simplicity which always should have been its leading characteristic. *Marie Antoinette* will fade out and *Mother Carey's Chickens* will fade in.

What of the Film Barons? . . .

WE WERE discussing the government's suits and my producer friend asked me, "What of the big executives who built the industry? What will be their place in the new order of things?" My answer was that no one built the industry, that it built itself and carried upward as it grew the heaviest burden of inefficiency any industry has had to struggle under; that there will be no places for the old executives in the new order unless they make them for themselves by acquiring some knowledge of the nature of the product they have for sale. If there be merit in the government's action—and all of us know there is—the barons have made their millions by unethical trade practices, and hereafter should be content to sell their services to their companies for what the services are worth. It would be slim picking for some of them, but at least it would save their faces and permit them to continue to strut around in step with the beating of tom-toms by their press agents.

* * *

GOLDEN RULE REVISED . . .

METRO'S talent contracts contain an option clause by which it can terminate a contract at certain time but which does not permit the other party to it to terminate it if such be his desire. The *Spectator* recently argued against such contracts, contending that both parties to them should have equal rights in the matter of terminating them. Metro has a contract with the Maxwell House Coffee people for its *Good*

News radio broadcast. It carries an option for a year's renewal if the sponsor desires to exercise it—and it provides that Metro, if so disposed, may terminate it when the first option comes around. Metro has a Golden Rule of its own: "Do unto others that which you will not permit others to do unto you."

* * *

DIRECTORS START SOMETHING . . .

TO THE Screen Directors' Guild is due credit for initiating one of the most constructive movements in the history of the film industry. Its thoughtful and impressive indictment of the production methods of the major studios is a long step towards effecting the reforms necessary to the continued prosperous existence of the industry. The director is the most important man in the cinematic scheme of things. All the other creative workers feed him with their efforts, and it rests with him to blend them into the finished product which makes its bid for public favor; he is the funnel into which the industry pours all its hopes. His voice, therefore, is powerful and should be heeded. There is nothing new in the directors' indictment, no revelation which will come as a surprise to anyone familiar with what goes on in the studios; but the fact that the directors have presented it, have put their united strength behind it, is a refreshingly new chapter in the story of motion pictures.

Relative Worth of Groups . . .

THE industry's greatest unnecessary financial extravagance is its associate producer system. The directors point out that in 1927 there were 743 American-made pictures and thirty-four supervisors and associate producers; that in 1937 there were 484 pictures and 220 supervisors and associates. In other figures, it took 800% more producers to produce forty per cent less pictures. What gives point to the figures is that at the present time the box-office is in a bad condition, for which pictures alone are responsible, and producers and associates are responsible for the pictures. That makes it obvious that if box-office conditions are to be improved—and they must be improved to keep the industry from collapsing—making the pictures must be entrusted to those who know how they should be made. As a group, directors possess the necessary knowledge in a greater degree than any other group. Writers I would place next. Associate producers constitute the most ignorant group when we regard them as a whole. Absurd salaries are the rule throughout the industry, but there are no others so absurd as those paid the majority of associate producers. Not only the amount paid them is wasted; they waste millions more by virtue of their unfitness for the jobs they hold.

But There Are Others . . .

THERE are, however, some fundamental principles which the directors must take into account in their efforts to improve things by the elimination of associate producers. Any art creation should be the product of one mind. With that one mind there should be no interference. But it is not important whose

mind it is. In the case of screen creation, it may be the mind of the director, writer, associate, or the gatekeeper's mother-in-law. Sir Christopher Wren's name is kept alive by the magnificent job he did in designing and building St. Paul's Cathedral in London, but it contains seven different architectural features of which he knew nothing. He engaged seven architects who had the necessary knowledge; told them what he wanted, got it, and the work of the seven is blended into the edifice which rightfully stands as a perpetual monument to the genius of Wren. Henry Blanke, an associate producer on the Warner lot, has more outstanding screen creations to his credit than any other producer. Different directors were employed, but all bear the stamp of the Blanke genius. And who, if not Joe Pasternak, associate producer for Universal, is to be credited with the piloting of Deanna Durbin to stardom? Would the Directors' Guild throw out Blanke and Pasternak—and there are others—for the sole reason that they are associate producers? Some of them are assets; others are liabilities. I am sure what the directors are aiming at is the elimination of the liabilities. . . . The sound you hear is the applause by which all the other intelligent workers in pictures signify their approval of the movement started by the Directors' Guild.

* * *

OFF TO A FLYING START . . .

FEW motion pictures have been greeted on their initial showings with such a wealth of lavish praise as that bestowed on *Marie Antoinette* following its opening at the Carthay Circle Theatre. Prior to the opening, Metro exploiters performed brilliantly in drawing the attention of the public to the extraordinary treat in store for it; the opening itself was one of the most brilliant of the long series of brilliant premieres which have distinguished the history of the attractive house; the airways carried its glories to millions of listeners and next morning the papers exhausted their supply of laudatory phrases in describing the glories of the ambitious production. Weeklies later followed suit. It was freely predicted that the run of the picture would break the Carthay Circle record even of *Snow White*, which ran eighteen weeks. There was only one rift in the lute of praise—the *Spectator* termed the picture poor entertainment and predicted that eight weeks would be the limit of its run, four weeks on its merits as a spectacle and four weeks on the pump priming of Metro exploitation.

Pump Priming Begins Early . . .

BEFORE the picture had been on the Carthay screen for two weeks, it demonstrated that the *Spectator* had been too generous in giving it four weeks before it would be necessary to resort to artificial respiration to keep it alive. The waning strength of a picture intended for a long run is indicated by an increase in the advertising space it occupies in the daily press. *Marie* was given increased space as the third week of its run began. The Carthay run means more to Metro than the money it brings in. In fixing terms

upon which the picture will be sold to exhibitors, a long run in Los Angeles would be a good selling argument, while a poor run would hurt sales. But I am afraid *Marie* is not destined for long runs anywhere. What puzzles me is why its weaknesses, so readily apparent on the screen, were not discovered in the script. Much is made of Robert Morley's fine performance, but it is a brilliant characterization of a negative part, and a negative part cannot carry a picture. All the leading characters are helpless victims of circumstances and only mob violence motivates anything. The British production, *Henry VIII*, was a box-office success because Charles Laughton made us interested in the King as a person, because history was used as a background for a human story. In the case of *Marie*, history is the story. Anyone with picture sense could have read the script of *Marie* and told Metro the picture would not be a box-office success. When those responsible for it have their day in court to justify, in the case now pending, the amounts paid them in salaries and bonuses, they will find it difficult to explain away *Marie Antoinette*.

* * *

SOME INCOMING MAIL . . .

WHEN any person, publication or organization makes complimentary reference to W. R. Hearst or anything that is his, the Hearst paper columns throw fits of typographical ecstasy. Nearly all publications, in fact, unblushingly present in their columns the nice things said about them. The *Spectator* uses as exploitation a six-page folder containing kind things said about it by prominent people and the press of this and various foreign countries, but it has been reticent about making public in its pages the favorable comments contained in letters from its Hollywood readers. Most of them come in the form of personal notes, obviously not intended for publication. The wish to publish them being father to the thought of how to do it, I herewith give you some of them, offering as the reason the desirability of acquainting readers outside of Hollywood with the manner in which the *Spectator* is regarded at home. The real reason, of course, is to flatter my ego. Obviously, I cannot take liberties with the names of those whose comments were intended for my reading only. I can assure you, however, that the signatures appended to many of them would cause a riot if displayed to a mob of autograph hunters.

They Say Kind Things . . .

FROM a female star: I would rather have faint praise from you than lavish praise from anyone else. . . . A male star: The *Spectator's* comments on acting in general constitute a text-book which I study faithfully. . . . A male star: Before the scene you praised so highly was shot, I asked (director) to let me do it my way in one take. I substituted gestures for about half the written lines, and that was the take that reached the screen. You see, I read you; I got the idea for the scene from something you wrote. . . . A director: I am not much interested in what the other reviewers say about my pictures, but I always wait impatiently to see what the *Spectator* says.

And take it from me, Welford, all the other fellows do the same thing. . . . A writer: Your reviews are the only ones worth a damn to a writer who is trying to improve himself. . . . A writer: You roasted my screen play; all the others praised it. I see now that you are the only one who was right. Thanks for a valuable lesson. . . . An associate producer: You certainly are entitled to take bows for ending most of the loud talking on the screen. Everyone I know gives you credit for it. . . . An associate producer: I always try to fashion my pictures on the lines the *Spectator* sets forth. At first I took you with a grain of salt. Now I gulp you. . . . An actor: You wrote that I am coming along rapidly. If so, I have the *Spectator* to thank for it. It is my guide, philosopher and friend. . . . A writer: I do not know which gives me the greater satisfaction—what you say or the graceful, expert manner in which you say it. . . . A producer: I am coming around to the belief that if we had paid more attention to the *Spectator* there would be less box-office depression now. . . . A director: A number of us were discussing you last night. We agreed that you know more about pictures than anyone else writing about them. . . . An actress: When a director does not let me talk my lines in a natural tone, I hurl you at him and quote you until he gives in. That is why you were able to say I am improving. . . . A writer: The *Spectator* is the nearest thing to a writers' text-book that I have found. I know it has been invaluable to me. . . . A director: It has been a long haul for you, but it is generally recognized in Hollywood now that you know your onions. . . . Myself: Of course, there are brickbats among the bouquets—not as many, but occasionally one like this, which came this morning: "Before you write anything further about the screen you should take time out to get some knowledge of it." In a recent *Spectator* I criticized unfavorably the picture of the writer who hurled this brickbat.

* * *

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

LOCAL paper tells us we have 34,000 gas meters in our Valley. Some Valley! One of the meters is ours. . . . All we need now is a white-shoe cleaner which will keep shoes white until a fellow gets home. . . . Reader wants to know if I am vain about anything else besides my assurance in picking future screen stars. Yes. I've a little pair of scissors which I use to unbeetle my eyebrows. . . . Strange that although I never attend a baseball game, I want the Yankees to win the American League pennant and don't care a hang who wins in the National League. . . . If you want to follow a really clever column, read George Phair's "Retakes" in *Daily Variety*. . . . And there's K.C.B. in *Daily News* and *Hollywood Citizen*, but he is my brother. . . . We have had jazz, blues, swing, but music has survived all of them. . . . To give away to four nice little girls: to each, one of Sophie's little ducks, white, quackless; make fine pets, but parents of each girl must promise her duck always will be kept as a pet; telephone Grace, my secretary, GLadstone 5213. . . . Twice a

day in the winter I put out food for the wild birds; now with the Valley full of trees whose branches are bowed with ripening fruit, one of my spreads for the birds lasts for nearly a week. . . . From where I sit I can reach out and touch the gentle velvet of a rose which opened gloriously during the night; seems impossible that it could be just an accident of nature. . . . The fastest growing things in the country are the Roosevelt deficit and Sophie's six ducklings. . . . At this season of the year I am a pushover for berry pies. . . . Grandfathers, please note: I need help. Wendy, my three-year-old granddaughter, has reached the "why?" and "what for?" stage. Told her what she was looking at was a shell I got from the sea. "What was it in the sea for?" You tell her. . . . Had a bit of luck just now; despite the hot sun, felt I no longer could put off spraying some plants which need it; discovered I had run out of spray liquid; back in the shade again. . . . Marquee we passed on our recent holiday trip: "Mae West in Everyday's a Holiday and Selected Shorts." . . . From across the dirt road which runs past our place, I can hear an occasional plop which tells me another ripe apricot has fallen to the ground. Think I'll stroll over, catch a couple and eat 'em. . . . Catch them? One caught me, an extremely ripe one, on top of my hatless head, and squashed. You will have to excuse me; a shampoo is in order.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

JOHN STAHL'S GREAT DIRECTION . . .

● **LETTER OF INTRODUCTION**; Universal release of John M. Stahl production; directed by John M. Stahl; features Adolphe Menjou, Andrea Leeds, George Murphy, Edgar Bergen, Charlie McCarthy, Rita Johnson, Ann Sheridan, Ernest Cosart, Frank Jenks, Eve Arden; Charles R. Rogers in charge of production; screen play by Sheridan Gibney and Leonard Spigelgass; based on an original story by Bernice Boone; photography, Karl Freund; art director, Jack Otterson; associate art director, John Ewing; film editors, Ted Kent and Charles Maynard; gowns, Vera West; musical direction, Charles Previn; assistant director, Joseph A. McDonough. Supporting cast: Jonathan Hale, Constance Moore, Frances Robinson, Eleanor Hansen, Raymond Parker, Stanley Honiss, Walter Perry.

GOOD because of good direction, because John Stahl knew his story, knew what he wanted and worked his players until he got it. In no screen offering is the story as important as the manner in which it is told. And no story is strong enough to tell itself. We leave the theatre after viewing *Letter of Introduction* with the conviction that the picture has a powerful story with a strongly dramatic psychological theme; yet from the same script John Stahl used, with the same cast and settings, a quite ordinary picture, without any particular appeal or merit, could have been shot. The Universal offering is a director's picture, but—and this is the hall-mark of good direction—audiences which see it, if they give any thought to the direction, probably will wonder why it was necessary to have a director for a story which so obviously tells itself. But those who can enjoy good

direction will find in the picture a hundred little touches that will delight them. For instance: Rita Johnson steps off the curb to cross a New York street; she bumps into a man who steps off at the same moment, bound in a diagonal direction; they go their separate ways, Rita, one of the principal characters, the man an extra whom we have not seen previously and do not see again. It is a little touch which persuades us we are looking at real life.

Even Excellence of Performances . . .

STAHL'S handling of mass shots reveals a fine sense of relative values. His crowds do not melt away to bring his principals into the camera; he makes his principals fight their way through the crowds and makes us discover them for ourselves. And when his players indulge in intimate conversations they speak in intimate tones. When Adolphe Menjou dies, the death scene is made great because his last words are whispered weakly, haltingly, yet we catch every syllable uttered by the dying man. Only perfect performances could result from such inspired direction as Stahl gives *Letter of Introduction*. No one in the picture carries off the acting honors. It is a strong human drama which is unfolded, and the people in it are ordinary human beings who are intent upon their own affairs and do not create the impression that they are actors playing parts. Taking them in the order which their names appear in the credits: Menjou's characterization of the great screen star will be rated as one of the finest among the many fine things he has done in pictures. He is sincere, compelling, and makes the actor just a person who does not act when he is off stage. Andrea Leeds definitely establishes herself as a coming star of magnitude. She was fortunate in that in this, her greatest part to date, she was under the direction of John Stahl who so successfully can plumb the depths of players and bring to the surface their emotional possibilities.

Bergen Is a Clever Fellow . . .

EDGAR BERGEN and that sly little lad of his are not dragged in by the heels as they were in *Goldwyn Follies*. Bergen plays a ventriloquist who has a definite place in the story, and Charlie McCarthy is the dummy he uses to entertain his friends. Mortimer, a goofy character dummy, also makes his appearance and makes a hit. The amazing cleverness of Bergen was rewarded with roars of laughter by the preview audience, and a lot of his lines were lost in the uproar. When not in Charlie's company Bergen

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reveals himself as an easy, convincing actor. George Murphy, Rita Johnson, Ann Sheridan, Ernest Cosart, Frank Jenks, Eve Arden and Jonathan Hale give performances of outstanding merit. I was impressed again with Hale's complete naturalness, and the something in Rita Johnson's personality that has emotional appeal. The cast was chosen with full regard for types and each part is played with that degree of authenticity which conveys the impression that no one else could have played it.

One the Box-Office Needs . . .

THE story is a psychologically sound exposition of its theme, one which at the outset reaches out, so to speak, to assemble its characters and then settles down to telling itself. The dialogue is crisp and to the point, that of Bergen sparkling with wit. Bernice Boone's original story was made into a smoothly flowing and logical screen play by Sheridan Gibney and Leonard Spigelgass. It is a script which does not reach for emotional climaxes, but contents itself with relating what it has to say and leaves to the audience the discovery of the emotional qualities. Being a story of New York, it was essential that the settings did their part in telling it. Jack Otterson, art director, and John Ewing, his associate, obviously designed the sets with full regard for the locale. The apartment of Menjou is a particularly fine piece of screen architecture. His wealth and fame are accentuated by refinement of detail and accentuation of scale which gain the feeling of good taste without loss of the intimacy which makes the apartment liveable. All the exteriors and interiors aimed at and achieved complete authenticity. The photography of that outstanding artist of the camera, Karl Freund, and all the other technical features of the production contribute their full share to the enjoyment *Letter of Introduction* will give you. And it will give the box-office what it needs so badly.

BOB HAS HAIR ON HIS CHEST . . .

● **THE CROWD ROARS;** Metro picture and release; stars Robert Taylor; produced by Sam Zimbalist; directed by Richard Thorpe; screen play by Thomas Lennon, George Bruce and George Oppenheimer; based on George Bruce's original story; photographed by John Seitz; montage effects by Slavko Vorkapich; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associate art directors, Eddie Imazu and Edwin B. Willis; musical score by Edward Ward; recording by Douglas Shearer; wardrobe by Dolly Tree; film editor, Conrad A. Nervig. Cast: Edward Arnold, Frank Morgan, Maureen O'Sullivan, William Gargan, Lionel Stander, Jane Wyman, Nat Pendleton, Charles D. Brown, Gene Reynolds, Donald Barry, Donald Douglas, Isabel Jewell, J. Farrell MacDonald.

METRO makes a handsome apology for its sissified exploitation of Bob Taylor. As the prize-fighter in *The Crowd Roars* he gives one of the most stirring, purely masculine performances seen on the screen in a long time. The surprising thing about Bob's appearance is the proficiency he displays as a boxer in the several prize-fight sequences the picture contains. He plays a young fellow who wanted to be a singer, but becomes a prize-fighter because of the

money it would bring him. *The Crowd Roars* will accomplish Metro's purpose by demonstrating to the public that Bob is a he-man and really has hair on his chest; but it will go farther and show that he is a much better actor than we thought he was. His prize-fighter characterization is the best thing he has done on the screen to date. To the credit of Sam Zimbalist, producer, is the fact that no effort is made to capitalize Bob's good looks. When he is fighting ferociously he looks like a ferocious fighter, not a handsome leading man. And if you like prize-fights you certainly will like *The Crowd Roars*. It is by long odds the best picture of the sort the screen has given us.

Hokum, But We Love It . . .

YOU will roar with the crowd during the last sequence. The girl Bob loves is in the hands of kidnappers and just before he enters the ring for the final fight he is told that unless he is knocked out in the eighth round, harm will be done her. He is permitting himself to being badly licked; the girl escapes and races to Madison Square Garden. Will she get there before the eighth round starts? Of course, you know she will, for in motion pictures they always do, but the knowledge will not keep you from getting terrifically excited; and when she dashes into the Garden with not more than a minute to spare, the screen three of my greatest screen loves, Anne Good old hokum, but you love it. And as Maureen O'Sullivan is the girl Bob is fighting for, you are doubly anxious to see everything turn out all right. Pictures I review in this *Spectator* have brought to the screen three of my greatest screen loves, Anne Shirley, Ruby Keeler and Maureen. Just by being themselves they always please me mightily, consequently my reviewing task has been particularly pleasant.

Well Written Screen Play . . .

THE screen play reveals expert workmanship by Thomas Lennon, George Bruce and George Oppenheimer. They have put on paper a picture which moves swiftly on the screen, one combining much vigorous action with tender romantic scenes, and without an overdose of dialogue. Some scenes are spoiled by poor dialogue direction. While a boy is singing softly a plaintive ballad, three characters make remarks to one another in tones even louder than the singing, yet no one apparently overhears them. To make the scene convincing the men should have whispered. It beats me how directors can be so stupid. All the members of the cast do good work. Edward Arnold, Frank Morgan, William Gargan, Lionel Stander, Jane Wyman and Nat Pendleton are particularly effective, and Gene Reynolds, attractive and clever boy, is fine as Bob Taylor as a youngster. Slavko Vorkapich's montage effects are striking as in a few seconds they sketch the career of Bob from boyhood until he has achieved prominence in the ring. As an aid to story-telling Vorkapich's skill is of considerable value to Metro pictures. *The Crowd Roars* is produced on an adequate scale, and the pho-

tography of John Seitz brings out all its pictorial values. It was no easy job editing a film so full of action but particularly in the prize-fight scenes the cutting of Conrad Nervig deserves praise.

ANOTHER STAR IS BORN . . .

● **GARDEN OF THE MOON**; Warners; producer, Hal Wallis; associate producer, Lou Edelman; story, H. Bedford Jones and Barton Browne; screen play, Jerry Wald and Richard Macauley; director, Busby Berkeley; dialogue directors, Gene Lewis and Hugh Cummings; photographer, Tony Gaudio; film editor, George Amy; music and lyrics, Warren & Dubin and Johnny Mercer. Cast: Pat O'Brien, Margaret Lindsay, Johnnie Davis, John Payne, Melville Cooper, Jimmy Fidler, Isabel Jeans, Mabel Todd, Dick Purcell, Granville Bates, Edward McWade, Larry Williams, Jerry Colonna, Joe Venuti, Curt Bois.

PARAMOUNT had him under contract for a couple of years, but apparently could see nothing in him; Warners took him over, gave him a big part in *Garden of the Moon*—and another star is born. John Payne has everything—youth, good looks, intelligence, agreeable singing voice, attractive personality and the knack of making a lounge suit look as formal as a dress suit and a dress suit appear to be as comfortable as a lounge suit. I think the young man will make feminine hearts flutter when the picture is released generally, so perhaps it is just as well that Anne Shirley's charms made him her slave and contented husband before he was discovered. Payne is no flash in the pan. He does not smile and sing his way through *Garden of the Moon*. He works his passage in a part that calls for a wide assortment of emotional reaction, and he is equal to every demand. Another agreeable acting surprise the picture provides us is the performance of Jimmie Fidler. While I do not approve of the manner in which Jimmie sometimes characterizes screen people on the air, I heartily applaud the easy manner in which he airs his own personality on the screen.

Warner Previews Always Noisy . . .

OF THE picture itself all one can say is that it is a musical somewhat above the average, expertly directed by Busby Berkeley who sets and maintains a lively pace, and having a story which takes some time to enlist one's interest, excessive noise being a detriment until what is happening finally penetrates the din sufficiently to hold the attention of the audience. Pat O'Brien unfortunately harks back to his early talkie performances and shouts nearly all his lines. As a characterization it is done with his accustomed skill and no doubt is what was demanded of him, but it would have been much more effective if he had been presented as a softly speaking night club manager. However, practically all Warner previews are characterized by sound stepped up to a point which makes the pictures appear like vulgar persons trying to impress their hearers by bawling at them, but perhaps we can expect audiences to be treated more mercifully when *Garden of the Moon* starts its regular runs. One of its outstanding merits is a really fine performance by Margaret Lindsay, who is given

a better opportunity here to display her wares than has fallen to her lot for some time. Other members of the long cast carry their parts with a zest that will give satisfaction.

It Will Make You Laugh . . .

AT THE preview I saw Bruno Ussher floating down the aisle. At the moment of writing I have no idea how the music in *Garden of the Moon* appealed to him, but in a later *Spectator* he will tell you himself. All I can say about it is that it pleased me mightily and that, to my way of thinking, Harry Warren, Al Dubin and Johnny Mercer are to be credited with making an exceedingly big contribution to the entertainment quality of the production. They were fortunate in having in John Payne a singer who could do full justice to their words and music. Hal Wallis with Lou Edelman as his lieutenant, did a good job in producing the picture, as did Robert Haas in designing the sets and Tony Gaudio in photographing them. Jerry Wald and Richard Macaulay turned in a script which reveals knowledge of dramatic construction and displays a lively sense of humor. You will do a lot of laughing when you view *Garden of the Moon*.

MRS. PAYNE APPEARS ALSO . . .

● **MOTHER CAREY'S CHICKENS**; RKO; producer, Pandro S. Berman; director, Roland V. Lee; screen play, S. K. Lauren and Gertrude Purcell; from novel by Kate Douglas Wiggin; play by Kate Douglas Wiggin and Rachel Crothers; musical director, Frank Tours; photographer, J. Roy Hunt; art director, Van Nest Polglase; film editor, George Hively. Cast: Anne Shirley, Ruby Keeler, James Ellison, Fay Bainter, Walter Brennan, Donnie Dunagen, Frank Albertson, Alma Kruger, Jackie Moran, Margaret Hamilton, Virginia Weidler, Ralph Morgan, Phyllis Kennedy, Harvey Clark, Lucille Ward, George Irving.

ONE of those sweet, tender, wholly human pictures; told simply, acted brilliantly, superbly directed. It is dramatized domestic simplicity, streaked with comedy to keep the lump in your throat from choking you. Nothing much happens and what story there is is about a wholly unimportant family, a group of nobodies, the widow of a naval officer who was killed in our war with Spain, her two daughters and two sons. All the fuss is about the action of another woman and her husband in buying a house and dispossessing the widow and her family who have rented it. Now take *Marie Antoinette*. There's a picture for you! It is about something—something big, gorgeously mounted, imposingly cast and showing hundreds of gowns, each costing more than all

BETTY BURBRIDGE

Writer

Columbia

the wearing apparel we see in *Mother Carey's Chickens*. But *Marie* does not raise a lump. It is aloof from us, cold and distant. *Chickens* is about us, warms the cockles of our hearts, appeals to children who have parents, parents who have children, and people who wish they were parents. See it and you will find yourself seated at a gentle emotional feast.

Lee's Direction Is Outstanding . . .

ROWLAND LEE gave it inspired direction, wove human feeling and gentle comedy into a heart-warming, even pattern, one without high spots or let-downs. It is obvious that he felt the story, laughed with it, cried with it, and made his players feel it. There is no acting in it, no straining for effect, no bid for tears either of laughter or sympathy. Therein lies its strength as entertainment. He makes us love the members of the family and those who are ranged on their side; makes us dislike those who would dispossess the family of the home of which it is so proud. S. K. Lauren and Gertrude Purcell gave the director a script of velvet smoothness, a gently falling spray of mixed emotions, but as matter-of-fact and logical in its forward progression as the multiplication table. Great writing and great direction could produce only great characterizations. At the head of the cast there are two of the sweetest, nicest girls in pictures, Anne Shirley and Ruby Keeler. If you can follow them through this picture without falling completely in love with both of them, there is something the matter with the thing you love with. It was a great week for the Paynes. John, the husband, appeared in the cinematic sky as a new and brilliant star, and, the next night, Anne, the wife, burnished the brilliance she already had acquired.

All Hands Deserve Credit . . .

COMPLETE naturalness is what gives charm to the performances of both the girls. Lee wisely let them play themselves, let them put over their appealing personalities. Ruby neither sings nor dances; is a person, not a performer. Jimmie Ellison, one of my favorite young fellows, takes another step forward, and Frank Albertson is wholly competent. Fay Bainter gives a skilful and appealing characterization as the mother whose chickens are the four children. Her elder son is played by that handsome, talented boy, Jackie Moran, and the baby of the family is Donnie Dunagan, who reaches the ripe old age of four years in a week or two. He is a delight. Walter Brennan, Ralph Morgan, Virginia Weidler, Margaret Hamilton, the late Harvey Clark, as well as those entrusted with the smaller parts, add greatly to the pleasure the picture will give you. Pan Berman is to be praised for piloting through to the screen such an outstanding example of screen entertainment. Edward Stevenson skilfully designed gowns which are true to the period of the picture and, at the same time, attractive to the eye of today. The Polglase settings and Ray Hunt's photography also deserve mention.

WILDNESS, BY WARNERS . . .

● **BOY MEETS GIRL**; Warners picture and release; executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Sam Bischoff; director, Lloyd Bacon; screen play by Bella and Samuel Spewack; from stage play by Bella and Samuel Spewack; photographed by Sol Polito; film editor, William Holmes; art director, Esdras Hartley; gowns, Milo Anderson; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; music and lyrics by M. K. Jerome and Jack Scholl; assistant director, Dick Mayberry. Cast: James Cagney, Pat O'Brien, Marie Wilson, Ralph Bellamy, Frank McHugh, Dick Foran, Bruce Lester, Ronald Reagan, Paul Clark, Penny Singleton, Dennie Moore, Harry Seymour, Bert Hanlon, James Stephenson.

WITHOUT a great deal of exaggeration the brothers Warner have turned their cameras on a motion picture studio and show us what goes on inside it. Naturally, the result is a very funny picture, one of the best comedies of the year. One of the funniest things about it is that Warner Brothers paid \$100,000 for the story. For that amount of money it could have bought a bushel of similar stories. But *Boy Meets Girl* was produced as a play in New York. In some mysterious way, known only to the masterminds who are running the film industry into bankruptcy, presentation in play form in New York gives a story greater box-office value in the Dakotas. I am too dull to know why, but the masterminds have it worked out, hence the \$100,000 to Bella and Sam Spewack for *Boy Meets Girl*, which Bella and Sam did not write. They watched it being enacted in various Hollywood studios, put it on paper, it was put on the stage, and now it is back at its birthplace. If when you see it you consider the goings-on rather strange picture studio behavior, remember, please, that truth always is stranger than fiction.

Gene and Graham Must See It . . .

ONE thing we must credit Warner Brothers with is the sense of humor they display in poking fun at their own business. In Jimmy Cagney and Pat O'Brien they present a pair of screwy scenarists who hereafter must be listed among Hollywood's top comedians; and in Marie Wilson they give us a comedienne with enough intelligence to play brilliantly a highly unintelligent girl. I have been waiting for Marie to get her chance. When she first appeared on the screen in an unimportant bit, I wrote of her (*Spectator*, August 29, 1936), "With proper han-

RUSSELL BENNETT

R. K. O.

dling, I am confident she could become a really brilliant actress." And just to show that I remained true to her (December 25, 1937): "A clever young miss whom I am still waiting to see cast in a role which will give her a chance to display her unique talents and individual personality." Ralph Bellamy tops any previous comedy performance he has given us. His efforts to retain his sanity in the insane world in which he moves, reveal his possession of a discriminating taste in comedy. Frank McHugh, as a typical Hollywood agent, also scores emphatically. Bruce Lester, a handsome young Englishman, will become a favorite with American audiences when *Boy Meets Girl* is released. Dick Foran, as an harassed Western star with a lustily developed ego, gives a capital performance. Under the production guidance of Sam Bischoff, a producer who rarely misfires; the capable direction of Lloyd Bacon, and with one of Warners' complete productions, photographed artistically by Sol Polito, the comedy comes to the screen as one of the pictures you must see. I recommend it particularly to my friends, Gene Towne and Graham Baker.

MARTHA RAYE PIPES DOWN . . .

● **GIVE ME A SAILOR**; Paramount picture and release; producer, Jeff Lazarus; associate producer, Paul Jones; director, Elliott Nugent; screen play by Doris Anderson and Frank Butler; from play by Anne Nichols; photographed by Victor Milner; film editor, William Shea; dances by Le Roy Prinz; art direction by Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; musical advisor, Phil Boutelje; musical direction by Boris Morros; songs by Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin; assistant director, Joseph Lefert. Cast: Martha Raye, Bob Hope, Betty Grable, Jack Whiting, Clarence Kolb, J. C. Nugent, Bonnie Jean Churchill, Nana Bryant.

Reviewed by Tom Miranda

FOR the reason that upon all previous occasions when I have seen Martha Raye in pictures, her loud shouting and over-acting have spoiled the picture for me, I tried to side-step this preview. I am glad now that I failed to do so. Martha is such a grand person off the screen, I was delighted to make the acquaintance of the new Martha Raye in this entertaining picture so ably directed by Elliott Nugent. As the family drudge who, through winning a leg-beauty contest, becomes a glamour girl with rosebud lips and gracious smile, she will add millions of fans to her lists. Herein she proves herself capable of far more than mugging and shouting. She is a splendid actress, shading the frequent changes of character with the deftness of a Broadway trooper, and winning whole-hearted sympathy in the part. Teamed with here is Bob Hope, as likable a nut as ever became a matinee idol, and together they add gaiety and laughs throughout the entire picture. There are many unexpected developments and twists in the plot of the story, which sparkles along at a gay rate of speed. Paramount will do well not to unhitch this admirable team for future productions. Bob Hope is just the right balance for Martha, and clever enough to push the team into high popularity among all classes and ages. Besides, the picture is of the whole family flavor, and will satisfy anybody who doesn't,

as Jimmy Fidler says, expect the Brooklyn Bridge for a quarter. Jack Whiting, of the Gay White Way, is a splendid dancer and actor of experience who never disappoints. Betty Grable, as Martha's scheming, selfish sister, made me want to wring her neck. And when any actress can arouse such a passion in a hard-boiled editor and writer of the make-believe-world, she is better than good.

Some Exploitation Slogans . . .

EXHIBITORS will profit greatly, if they stress their advertising and exploitation of this picture with a punch line about "The new Martha Raye"—"Martha Raye, the new glamour girl with rosebud lips"—"The new Martha Raye with million dollar legs and rosebud lips" . . . and she will make new admirers everywhere. My congratulations to Doris Anderson and Frank Butler for a well written script; to Victor Milner, A.S.C., for his photography, and Billy Shea for his editing. Billy has been handling the shears for more than twenty years, and with constant improvement in the art. Several songs add much charm to the picture. One especially aroused my patriotic feelings: *The U. S. A. and You*, by Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin. If some rash dictator ever gets a notion that Uncle Sam needs toning down, all Sammie need do is send a quartet through the country singing this song and ten million Yanks will fall in line and tramp said dictator to pulp. My advice to the family is—go see *Give Me a Sailor* and have a very enjoyable evening.

PENNER GETS LAUGHS . . .

● **I'M FROM THE CITY**; RKO production and release; produced by William Sistrom; directed by Ben Holmes; screen play by Nicholas T. Barrows, Robert St. Clair and John Grey; original story by Ben Holmes; musical director, Roy Webb; photography, Frank Redman; special effects by Vernon L. Walker; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate art director, Howard Campbell; gowns by Renie; recorded by John E. Tribby; edited by Ted Cheesman; songs, "I'm from the City" and "I'm a Tough Coyote," by Hal Raynor. Cast: Joe Penner, Richard Lane, Kay Sutton, Paul Guilfoyle, Lorraine Krueger, Kathryn Sheldon, Ethan Laidlaw, Lafayette McKee, Edmund Cobb, Clyde Kinney.

Reviewed by Tom Miranda

ADMITTING that Richard Harding Davis introduced the chief idea of this picture in his short-short away back in 1892; that numerous producers

WALTER CONNOLLY

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of stage and screen have used it before, the fact remains that it is always sure-fire comedy material, and as such, Joe Penner gets more laughs out of it than any of his predecessors on stage or screen. Therefore, I recommend it to all Joe Penner fans, and to every other person with a grouch or in need of a good laugh. The story concerns a young man, who has an inherent fear of horses, being forced to ride to save his face. But the ride that Joe Penner puts on will undoubtedly class him as the world's greatest rider. He does everything but hang by his teeth from the horse's bit, and why that escaped the gentlemen who wrote in the gags, is beyond me. Tom Mix, Buck Jones, Ken Maynard and all their ilk had better look to their laurels. Joe Penner is a rootin', tootin', ridin' fool, believe it or not!

All Play Like Penner . . .

BUT—and there's usually a but in all pictures—the able producer, Bill Siström, whose long list of successful productions over a period of almost twenty years establishes him firmly, could have made this Penner comedy one of the outstanding laughfests of the year. The one great fault of the picture is that the growing suspense leading up to the race was muffed. It could have been made tremendous. This is due in the most part to the fact that almost every performer plays his part like the goofy Joe. We expect Penner to act like a brainless idiot. But when every other performer of the part does likewise, it detracts from the star and leaves his part blah! . . . establishing the fact that he is the greatest rider any of the cast have ever seen is sufficient reason, in this day and age of goofiness, to make him a hero, at least to his cast. . . . If the other members of his cast had been serious throughout, Joe's part would have stood out more prominently. . . . But maybe I'm wrong. . . . Anyhow, producers will make no mistake in exploiting this as a really funny Penner picture. Play up the race . . . the greatest and most thrilling ride of the year, with Joe juggling ducks and pigs throughout a ride that makes Dick Turpin look like a piker.

FATES OF NATIONS AT STAKE . . .

● **MR. MOTO'S LAST WARNING**; 20th-Fox picture and release; producer, Sol M. Wurtzel; director, Norman Foster; original screen play, Philip MacDonald; based on character created by John P. Marquand; photography, Virgil Miller; art director, Bernard Herzbrun; assistant art director, Louis Creber; film editor, Norman Colbert; costuming by Helen A. Myron; musical director, Samuel Kaylin; sound by E. Clayton Ward and William H. Anderson. Cast: Peter Lorre, Ricardo Cortez, Virginia Field, John Carradine, George Sanders, Joan Carol, John Davidson, Margaret Irving, Robert Coote.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

A GAIN the invincible, redoubtable, and phenomenally lucky Mr. Moto comes to the aid of humanity, and with a prowess and cunning that should please his many fans mightily. A commendable thing about Mr. Moto is that he nearly always undertakes to solve cases the outcome of which will vitally effect large numbers of people or even man-

kind in general. In *Mr. Moto's Last Warning* the fates of nations hang in the balance. Philip MacDonald, notably prolific mystery story writer, and Norman Foster, who collaborated with him to such good effect in the writing of the last of the series, *Mysterious Mr. Moto*, have set the present story in another unusual and large-scale situation. One of the major powers, seeking to disrupt friendly relations between England and France, has plotted to blow up a French fleet with hidden mines as it comes into the bay of Alexandria for practice maneuvers. Just what power is behind the dastardly plot is never revealed to the audience, naturally, though the principal characters come by the information in the final scene and reflect considerable amazement, this lending a quiz-zical note to the finis.

Peopled With Colorful Types . . .

HOWEVER, it is the harrowing predicaments in which the various characters, good and bad, find themselves, as well as the vivid characters themselves, which contribute most to holding our interest. Director Norman Foster has again displayed a good theatrical sense in the colorful way in which he has drawn the many types which people the story, mostly flotsam and jetsam washed up into the Egyptian port. An amusing touch is contained in the bit where a waiter in one of the dives brings a huge stein of beer to a sailor who has suddenly gone prostrate across the table. The waiter simply lifts the fellow's head by the hair, places the stein before him,

JAMES WONG HOWE

A. S. C.

Director of Photography



Recent Release

"ALGIERS"

A Walter Wanger Production

and lets his face fall into it with a splash. The progress of the action is smooth, and in changes of locale good use is made of transitional devices—a shot of a map which fades into an actual scene, and the like.

Trouping Is Good . . .

PETER LORRE plays with his usual suavity. The present script does not afford him opportunity for deft characterizations such as he created in the previous film, but he nevertheless makes of Mr. Moto an arresting little figure (not a pun). Outstanding is Virginia Field, who plays her shady lady with considerable emotional depth. Ricardo Cortez, George Sanders, and John Carradine all give good performances, the latter making the most of one of the most horrible deaths ever concocted for the screen—being left to suffocate in a diving chamber at the bottom of the ocean, the cable having been cut. The talented English comic, Robert Coote, provides most of the humor, and very gingerly, though I think at times his work would have profited by some modification. The art work, photography, and editing, needless to say, are first-rate.

SCENES PLAYED SANS TROUSERS . . .

● **BULLDOG DRUMMOND IN AFRICA**; Paramount production and release; associate producer, Edward T. Lowe; director, Louis King; screen play, Garnett Weston; based on "Challenge," by H. C. (Sapper) McNeile; photography, William C. Mellor; art director, Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; edited by Anne Bauchens; assistant director, Mel Epstein; musical director, Boris Morros. Cast: John Howard, Heather Angel, H. B. Warner, J. Carrol Naish, Reginald Denny, E. E. Clive, Anthony Quinn, Michael Brooke, Matthew Boulton, Neil Fitzgerald.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

ONE of the best of the Drummond series. The show gets off on an amusing note of whimsy growing out of the circumstance that Drummond's friends, in leaving no stone unturned to insure against his being snatched away from the altar to pursue some case requiring his discerning faculties, as usually happens, have even deprived the captain and his man servant of their trousers. So during the opening of the story the two carry on sans trousers. But fate is not to be outwitted, and along comes another case. It takes the familiar group of characters, Drummond, his man servant, his comical friend Algy, and the bride-to-be on an aeroplane jaunt to Africa, in pursuit of the head of Scotland Yard, who has been kidnapped by some crafty rogues bent on extracting from him knowledge of a new radio invention held in secrecy by the British government because of its value in case of war, the culprits intending to sell the information to a foreign power. Hungry lions, gun battles and other excitements the story takes in its stride ere its close. Garnet Weston is responsible for the eventful screen play, which was taken from a yarn by H. C. McNeile.

Boasts Unusual Finesse . . .

MANY of the scenes possess a finesse unusual for a picture of the thriller type, thanks largely to the subtle playing of two accomplished actors, H. B.

Warner and J. Carrol Naish, appearing respectively as the kidnapped Colonel and the unctuous ring-leader of the gang. The ironic amenities they keep up are finely portrayed. Louis King has gotten the utmost in dramatic effect from these scenes and has given the picture as a whole smoothness and ease of movement, as well as good pace. Here and there occur bits of action in the script which one might wish he had used his directorial authority to improve, but then, the ultimate cannot be expected in pictures with short shooting schedules. Most noticeable of these bits is the failure of Drummond's group to react but in a casual manner when the plane from which they have just alighted explodes, a timed bomb having been concealed in it. This casual reception of a narrow escape from death undoubtedly detracts from the suspense which might have been engendered by the precarious situations in which they soon find themselves. Characters in thrillers do not react nearly enough. If they did, they could make the circumstances in which they are involved seem much more dangerous and their conquering of them much more remarkable. John Howard is as personable and believable as usual in his role of Drummond; and Reginald Denny, E. E. Clive, Heather Angel and others of the cast do well by their assignments. The heavily moody photographic shots reveal good craftsmanship on the part of William C. Mellor, and the art direction of Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick, as well as Anne Bauchens' editing lend merit to the picture.

ARTHUR LANGE

MUSICAL DIRECTOR

and

COMPOSER



TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX

VEHICLE IS INADEQUATE . . .

● **MEET THE GIRLS**; 20th-Fox production and release; director, Eugene Forde; associate producer, Howard J. Green; features June Lang, Lynn Bari, Robert Allen, Ruth Donnelly, Gene Lockhard, Wally Vernon and Eric Rhodes; original screen play by Marguerite Roberts; photographed by Edward Snyder; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Haldane Douglas; film editor, Fred Allen; musical direction, Sam Kaylin. Supporting cast: Constantine Romanoff, Jack Norton, Emmett Vogan, Paul McVey, Harlan Briggs.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

THE idea for a series of films recounting the fortunes of two adventuresome young women "on the loose," would seem to be a promising one, but in *Meet the Girls* an inadequate vehicle is provided for introducing the girls, and we are introduced to not quite the right kind of girls. Serving for a story is an unconvincing and sometimes tedious employment of the stolen-gem-on-shipboard formula. In as much as the gem moves from one character to another purely at the whim of the author and not through any intrigue, there is no logical reason for the story ending when it does; the exchange could go on *ad infinitum*. An apparent dearth of invention is reached when the two girls get possession of the gem, but do not return it to the owner or to the captain because they assertedly fear prosecution. All of the characters are plainly dangled on strings by the author, and one develops little interest in them, despite that some expert playing goes into several of the parts. Gene Lockhart in particular gives a comedy performance with rousing highlights, as a multi-millionaire with a complex for diseases, who imagines himself at death's door and spends much of his time groaning for a doctor. Too bad the part could not have been more convincingly motivated. Ruth Donnelly also has some very amusing moments as his flirtatious wife, beset by a flattering young blackmailer.

Simple Psychology Involved . . .

IN SHOPS and factories and small towns throughout the country there must be a legion of young women who do not find life as exciting as they could wish it, and who would take to the idea of sharing vicariously the experiences of two adventuresome young women on the screen. But these filmic characters, if they are to win a wide following of friends, must reflect the character traits which the aggregate of real-life girls admire in companions. This is simple psychology. The real-life girls probably will not admire an addiction to gambling so strong in one of the characters that she brazenly pushes her way into a ring of sailors; nor will they admire seeing the other become so drunk she "passes out." About these two girls there is a certain ambiguousness; we are given to believe they are essentially decent, and yet they do some things which would seem to indicate that they were deprived of a mother's loving care. The whole tone of the picture is not especially pleasant, nearly everyone in it being a drunk, a maritally unfaithful one, a thief, a blackmailer, an habitual gambler, or a groaning psychological case. Maybe I

BARRY TRIVERS



*Screenplay**

"ARMY GIRL"

*In Collaboration

Best Wishes

To The Spectator

DOROTHY PARKER

and

ALAN CAMPBELL

Members Screen Writers' Guild

missed my guess as to the film's intended audience. Could it have been designed for touts? Lynn Bari strikes something of characterization as one of the girls, and she has genuineness and force in her Sadie Thompsonish moments. June Lang is uneasy and indefinite in her part. Neither role is helped by the total absence of romantic interest. Robert Allen, Wally Vernon and Erik Rhodes do about all with their parts that they could, though the latter is probably miscast. Eugene Forde directed.

ANOTHER RACKET EXPOSED . . .

● **THE CHASER**; producer, Frank Davis; director, Edwin L. Marin; screen play, Everett Freeman, Harry Ruskin, and Bella & Samuel Spewack; original, Chandler Sprague & Howard Emmet Rogers; art director, Cedric Gibbons; photographer, Charles Lawton; film editor, George Boemler. Cast: Dennis O'Keefe, Ann Morriss, Lewis Stone, Nat Pendleton, Henry O'Neill, Ruth Gillette, John Qualen, Robert Emmett Keane, Jack Mulhall, Irving Bacon, Pierre Watkin.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

DEAR, dear, the things that go on in this world! Everyone has heard of the ambulance chaser, the shyster lawyer who gets a client at the scene of his misfortune and endeavors to cook up as strong a case as can be gotten by with, but who would have suspected that this ambulance chasing has become a highly organized racket, that some of the shysters carry along their own witnesses to the scene and even employ a disreputable doctor to give false reports? Such lawyers hurry clients off to the hospital when they are scarcely scratched, and in some way or another persuade them to cooperate in collecting unjustifiable damages. When opportunity presents itself, as when a street car or train is wrecked, professional accident fakers are brought to the scene to strew themselves about. Railway companies in particular lose many thousands of dollars a year by such practices. This is the expose with which *The Chaser* concerns itself. The material provides many novel situations, which Director Edwin L. Marin has handled with punch and humor, and the result is an amusing B product, though it does not leave an altogether pleasant aftertaste.

Is Anybody Honest . . .

THE philosophical threads in the story seem to have been tangled just a bit, which can easily happen when four writers collaborate on a screen play, even when the scriptists are as well known as Everett Freeman, Harry Ruskin, and the Spewacks. Two other scribes did the original. At any rate, what moral view they have taken toward the racket is rather hard to make out. Most of the episodes are presented in a humorous light, even one where the victim expires, and at the end it turns out that the attorneys for the railway company, bent on having the ambulance-chasing hero disbarred, are almost as ruthless as he in attaining their objective. In fact, in one scene the hero attempts to justify his conduct by explaining that he was once a sweet boy, when just out of law school, but became embittered and cynical

Best Wishes

from

CHARLES MARTIN

UNIVERSAL

LOUIS KING

Directed

"Prison Farm"

"Hunted Men"

"Tip-Off Girls"

for

Paramount

when his first client, a youth badly injured in a railway accident, was gyped out of due recompense by the crafty corporation lawyers. The inference would seem to be that practically no lawyers are honest. And what will Mr. Hays think of having the hero go so flippantly on his way at the finish without having to pay for his many crimes against justice, even though under the influence of the only girl he has vowed to turn over a new leaf? Shouldn't he at least have been shot in the arm, or something?

O'Keefe Shows Promise . . .

SOME of the character traits of the central figure seem a bit incongruous. That mere embitterment could turn a sweet boy into such a brazen, feverish, Walter Winchellish fellow is rather hard to believe. Moreover, though at heart he is supposed to be kindly and sympathetic, and we are supposed to like him, some of the raw deals he pulls could scarcely be expected to win admiration. But for all that, the character, played with much vitality by Dennis O'Keefe, is convincing most of the time. O'Keefe, whom I have not seen on the screen before, seems to have good possibilities for a future in motion pictures. To describe him in a favored Hollywood fashion, he is something of a cross between Jimmy Cagney, Fred Astaire, and Gary Cooper, if that means anything to you. He has mastered the staccato gestures for the present part very well, and plays with sufficient assurance, though he is not as fluent in facial expression as he could be. Probably his make-up could be improved, which would help the expression. Too, he frowns a bit too deeply and too often.

Other Characters Capable . . .

VERY attractive and competent is Ann Morriss, as the girl who is employed by the railway attorneys to trap the shyster, and proceeds to fall in love with him. Her lighter moments, especially the whimsical ones at the first of the story, were very pleasing, though she might have given greater variety and force to the heavier scenes. Lewis Stone is again impressive as a dissolute old doctor, and Nat Pendleton and the always-dependable Henry O'Neill do well in their parts. Of the others, John Qualen registers strongly in an immensely funny impersonation of a dull-witted Swede, funny in the way in which screen humor is always most effective—when it is simple and subtle. And fans will be glad to see Jack Mulhall back in harness again, doing an expert bit of

Roy Del Ruth

*Best Wishes
to the
Spectator
A Reader*



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acting as one of the chaser's assistants. One need only mention Cedric Gibbons and enough is said of the art direction. Both photography and editing are satisfactory.

REVENGE THE MOTIVE . . .

● IN OLD MEXICO; Paramount; producer, Harry Sherman; director, Edward D. Venturini; screen play, Harrison Jacobs; photographer, Russell Harlan; art director, Lewis J. Rachmil; Film Editor, Robert Warwick. Cast: William Boyd, George Hayes, Russell Hayden, Paul Sutton, Allan Garcia, Jane Clayton, Trevor Bardette, Betty Amann, Anna Demetrio, Glenn Strange, Tony Roux.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

AN EVENTFUL drama indeed is *In Old Mexico*, latest of the Hopalong Cassidy pictures. It is a story of revenge, in which The Fox, a notorious badman, seeks to even the score with Hopalong and his friend Don Carlos, who were instrumental in having the fellow apprehended by the law at an earlier time. The young Mexican is murdered in cold blood as he journeys across the desert to his father's rancho, but the American cowboy and his two well-known pals, Windy and Lucky, stay on at the rancho as guests of the victim's grieved family, in an effort to discover the hideout of the villain and his men in the hills nearby. Suspense is lent to the narrative by the fact that anyone leaves the rancho at the jeopardy of his life, the badman keeping constant watch from the hills. The picture has been given a large-scale production for a film of this type, the most being made of the colorful background of Old Mexico, and theatre-goers will find it a superior Western in many ways.

Individual Characterizations . . .

WILLIAM BOYD pleases again with his affable, easy, and always convincing characterization of Hopalong. He is one of the few Western stars who present us with a human being rather than a screen actor going through a gun-juggling routine. George Hayes and Russell Hayden, as Windy and Lucky, also strike individual characterizations, and are as likeable as they have been in previous stories. Unusual development: Lucky dares to take a poke at Hopalong in a moment of misunderstanding, but the latter manfully takes command of the situation by getting up and slapping the youngster's face. Most of the other characters in the Clarence E. Mulford story are accorded well-rounded impersonations by a capable cast, which virtue should insure the film's appealing to a considerably wider margin of the public than do the majority of films of this type. Director Edward D. Venturini deserves credit for this merit, as well as for the dramatic force of several scenes.

Musical Background Enhances . . .

ANOTHER merit of the production is the use of a musical background in numerous portions. Who contrived or composed it is not revealed by the credit sheet, but it adds greatly to the effectiveness of the scenes during which it is heard, notably so when the party comes from the rancho with torches in the

LEW AYRES



FRED ASTAIRE



night to find the body of young Don Carlos. There are also interludes of song in the picture which give color. Most of the singing is done in a very agreeable way by a seniorita with the surprisingly Anglo-Saxon name of Jane Clayton, a vivacious personality who also keeps the screen alive with a spirited performance of her role. One other member of the cast who does much to fill the screen with liveliness is Anna Demetrio who, as a buxom and humorous Mexican servant woman, had the audience with her in each of her appearances. Over a steaming dish of Producer Harry Sherman's enchiladas, following the preview, I had the pleasure of meeting this unusual character actress, who was gracious and amicable, and expressed herself as being eager to make friends, having been in Hollywood but a short time. She should make friends, both in Hollywood and with the general public, who would surely welcome her beaming countenance in future pictures. Another outstanding member of the cast is Trevor Bardette, as the grieved father. Basso profundo Paul Sutton, Allan Garcia and Betty Amann also essay important roles with competence. Art direction, photography and editing are first class.

NICELY MOUNTED COMEDY . . .

● **A DESPERATE ADVENTURE;** Republic production and release; John H. Auer, associate producer and director; screen play by Barry Trivers; original story by Hans Kraly and M. Coates Webster; photographed by Jack Marta; supervising editor, Murray Seldeen; film editor, Ernest Nims; art director, John Victor Mackay; costumes by Irene Saltern. Cast: Ramon Novarro, Marian Marsh, Margaret Tallichet, Eric Blore, Andrew Tombes, Tom Rutherford, Maurice Cass, Erno Verebes, Michael Kent, Cliff Nazarro, Rolfe Sedan, Gloria Rich, Lois Collier.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

ANOTHER of the series of Ramon Novarro comedies currently produced by Republic. Unpretentious, frothy, this one of the series will do well on the other half of a double bill. Recounting the story of an artist who meets the ideal he had visualized on canvas, usual complications set in when people are horrified to find the young miss on canvas in a somewhat unclad pose. Everything is finally settled when the artist realizes that his ideal was a bit of a prig after all, and her younger, more unobtrusive sister was really the woman for him. Screen play by Barry Trivers, based on the original by Hans Kraly and M. Coates Webster, moved along with polish and lilt. There were halting stretches of dialogue in some instances, and the opening, in particular, might have been more thoroughly edited to remove unnecessary footage.

Cast Is Good . . .

HEADED by Ramon Novarro, who is his usual smooth, polished self, the cast includes a number of fine supporting players. Eric Blore as the butler does a creditable piece of work, and Marian Marsh as the ideal who does not jell is sufficiently feline to be convincing. My current choice is Margaret Tallichet, recently announced for a major role in *Gone With the Wind*, as fluffy a bit of femininity as has passed

Paul
Guilfoyle

◁▷

R. K. O.

Kathleen
and
Gene
LOCKHART

in view for some time. Miss Tallichet obviously lacks experience. But there is a depth that is discernable. She does not seem to be just another flash in the pan. Andrew Tombes carried the role of the outraged rotarian papa well, got every laugh that his lines afforded. Rolfe Sedan in the role of Prefect of Police stood out in a minor comedy part.

Handled With Care . . .

ALTHOUGH an inexpensively budgeted picture, *A Desperate Adventure* shows evident care. Associate Producer and Director John H. Auer has given his picture work and attention. Artist Ball scenes and boat scenes and dock scenes were well handled, suggested the presence of production values. Art Director John Victor Mackay designed some solid sets that had all the air of lavishness. Film Editors Murray Seldeen and Ernest Nims carried the story along in the right tempo, but for a somewhat slow opening. A word, too, on some of Irene Saltern's dress creations. Margaret Talichet's evening dress caught my eye, kept my attention from the narrative. I don't know whether that is praise or not.

ADULT WESTERN . . .

● **PAINTED DESERT**; RKO; producer, Bert Gilroy; director, Dave Howard; screen play, John Rathmell and Oliver Drake; story, Jack Cunningham; photography, Harry Wild; art direction, Van Nest Polglase and Lucius Croxton; musical director, Roy Webb; montage, Douglas Travers; film editor, Frederic Knudtson; songs by Ray Whitley and Oliver Drake. Cast: George O'Brien, Laraine Johnson, Ray Whitley, Stanley Fields, Maude Allen, Fred Kohler, Sr., Lloyd Ingraham, Harry Cording, Max Wagner, Lee Shumway, William V. Mong.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

UNUSUAL is the Western that has adult appeal. Unusual, therefore, is Producer Bert Gilroy's picture, *Painted Desert*. He has selected a plausible, carefully worked out story, given it a good cast, and embellished it with production values ordinarily lacking in pictures of this category. It seems to me that the producer who can take his Westerns as seriously as that must be trying to create something worthwhile. And for Editor Beaton's special delight, some of the sequences show horses walking. *Painted Desert* is more than a "chase 'em-shoot 'em" meller. Set against the beautiful background of Arizona scenery, the story recounts the fight for tungsten. There have been few good, exciting mining stories. I think this one emerges well ahead of the rest.

Cast Is Good . . .

HEADING the cast is George O'Brien. I always remember George as the lead in Murnau's *Sunrise*, and I always remember that he will be as good as the material he is given allows. Someday some producer may have the perspicacity to give him the kind of part worthy of him. In his present effort he gives his part all that it calls for; any more would have been overacting. Laraine Johnson is a newcomer to the screen who has good looks and camera poise. I see her in better parts with a little more experience. Stanley Fields has a flair for robust comedy that I saw in *Algiers*. Up to then I had seen him in noth-

WARNER BAXTER

CRANE WILBUR



ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

ALCATRAZ ISLAND

ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

OVER THE WALL

(In Collaboration)

ORIGINAL STORY

CRIME SCHOOL

(Screenplay in Collaboration)

WARNER BROS.

ing but slothful heavy roles. I am glad that Director David Howard gave him a chance to be light in his heavy sort of way. William V. Mong returns before these eyes after a long absence. I should like to see anyone else do his skinflint better. Another case of a fine actor who is deprived of the opportunity of getting the kind of roles he can do well. If I mistake not Maude Allen, playing the part of Yukon Kate, is a Little Theatre product. Her stage experience stands her in good stead, although I hoped that her voice would not continue to be pitched in the same monotone from one end of the picture to the other.

Where Was the Music? . . .

DIRECTOR HOWARD has some beautiful background shots. His special effects, cameraed by Harry Wild, were excellent. His riding and wagon shots were splendid. And the montage by Douglas Travers gave the picture special importance. I liked the song, *Moonlight on the Painted Desert*, by Ray Whitley and Oliver Drake, but why didn't Music Director Roy Webb put music in where it was needed most, in those sequences dealing with the chase? To the credit of Screen Writers John Rathmell and Oliver Drake is the fact that dialogue is sparingly used. Based on a story by Jack Cunningham, they have given *Painted Desert* a good continuity. I cannot be generous with Editor Frederic Knudtson who might have used the shears less sparingly in the beginning of the picture. I think the direction of the herd stampede sequences and the mine explosion deserve special mention. *Painted Desert* is an intelligent picture that has appeal for all. What it needed most was a clear musical background.

MICE WILL PLAY . . .

● **GATEWAY**; 20th-Fox picture and release; co-stars Don Ameche and Arleen Whelan; Darryl F. Zanuck in charge of production; associate producer, Samuel G. Engel; director, Alfred Werker; screen play by Lamar Trotti; based on a story by Walter Reisch; photography, Edward Cronjager; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Albert Hogsett; set decorations, Thomas Little; film editor, James B. Morley; costumes, Gwen Wakeling; sound recording, Bernard Freericks and Roger Heman; musical direction, Arthur Lange. Supporting cast: Gregory Ratoff, Binnie Barnes, Gilbert Roland, Raymond Walburn, John Carradine, Maurice Moscovitch, Harry Carey, Marjorie Gateson, Lyle Conrad, E. E. Clive, Russell Hicks, Charles Coleman, Gerald Oliver Smith, Albert Conti.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

JUDGING from what was supposed to be a motion picture called *Gateway*, I think someone did a little off-record playing while Zanuck was awaying. This current effort from Twentieth takes a high place in my judgment as one of the season's worst. Associate Producer Sam Engel ought to know when a script is or is not ready for the camera. His present production is as tight as a ten-pound bag of sugar without a bag. The plot rattles back and forth, never gets started, and never ends anywhere. Recounting the experiences, inevitably a la *Grand Hotel*, of various immigrants passing through Ellis land, the picture gives us some rather unfortunate impressions of this country we live in. Add to the

EDITH FELLOWS

"She Married Her Boss"

"Pennies From Heaven"

"Little Miss Roughneck"

"City Streets"

For
Columbia Studio

JACK OTTERSON

Supervising Art Director
UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Jack Otterson's intelligence as an art director becomes more apparent, his inspiration always obviously being the script. He preserves the unity of characters and the settings in which they are presented. —WELFORD BEATON, Hollywood Spectator.

Grand Hotel formula a little red baiting, a prison break on the part of deportees, some thorough flag waving, pathos, villainy and heroics—topped with some incredibly bad acting, directing and writing—and we have *Gateway*.

Script Is Loose . . .

THE story is slow in starting. The audience interest is never raised above tepidity. None of the characters rings true, and the situations are as phoney as Arleen Whelan's Irish lassie accent. The thought that an immigrant might be kept out of the country for slapping the face of an over-amorous boor, knocking him unconscious, is a little thick. And thereon, gentlemen, hangs our little tale. To the rescue comes News Correspondent Don Ameche. But villainy rears its ugly head in the person of Gilbert Roland, a gangster who evades his income tax. Now the Village Theatre audience hissed Mr. Roland because of the despicable way in which he chewed his gum. That is not the kind of behavior Fox expects of its free pass customers. A last minute prison break unleashes hell, this time in the person of John Carradine, the leader of a gang of deportee cutthroats. But the harbor police come in time. Don straightens out his hair; Arleen her accent; and Lamar Trotti his script. Twittering birds in the background.

An American Tragedy . . .

HERE is the case of a good theme gone bad. There must be drama and color on Ellis Island, but not the kind which gives Gregory Ratoff the opportunity to throw custard pies. If my memory serves me right, this is the one in which Prince Michael Romanoff had his imperial finger. When the directors recently charged sixty per cent waste and the remaining forty per cent inefficiency, they might have cited *Gateway* to prove their case. What hand the prince had in the making of this picture, if any, is questionable. He may have coached Gregory Ratoff in the role of a Brooklyn-born phoney. But reliable rumor says that he got \$10,000 for his little stint. Maurice Moscovitch portrays a discontented alien who hates all governments. It is a little too far-fetched to think that he would damn the United States government while trying to convince immigration officials of his fitness for entry. This must be a sample of Twentieth's awareness of sociology beyond Del Mar and Inglewood. For my part, the characterization is not only untrue, it is unfair and unwarranted. *Gateway* might have been a fine, inspiring picture. As it stands it is badly done and in bad taste.



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Also

"Captain Alan Sanford"
Opposite Joan Bennett in

"THE TEXANS"

Directed by
James Hogan



To Play the Lead in

"KING OF CHINA TOWN"

Kurt Neumann
to Direct

Management of
STANLEY BERGERMAN, INC.

POWER AND GLORY OF THE CINEMA

By Mabel Keefer

THERE are power and glory in "them thar" films that cannot be valued in terms of gold and silver, but which, nevertheless, mean gold and silver to the film industry. The power of suggestion wielded by the screen is such a tremendous force that it becomes a little frightening, and the glory that it has achieved, great as it is, is only a drop in a bucket that might be filled to overflowing. When it becomes a recognized fact that using the screen as a medium to buck up the human race—to give it courage, faith, kindness and the will to laugh heartily—is synonymous with good box-office, then will come the golden era of the cinema. No institution can prosper above and beyond the prosperity of the people supporting it, and no civilization that does not strive for the highest and best can achieve and hold prosperity. Therefore, it would seem to be only applied common sense that that which benefits mankind, must of necessity benefit the motion picture business.

As a Man Thinks, So Is He . . .

THE things that are continually held up before us are the things we think about, and that is why it is so vital that the things we see on the screen should better our minds and hearts and give us new spiritual values. A statement like that will be received with sneering smiles or perhaps loud guffaws in some quarters, because it will be assumed that something dull and stupid is implied. On the contrary, what we need is a combination of human values, wit, wisdom and humor, that will show us what a vibrant thing good living really is. And that we need something like this badly, is shown by the appalling increase in the number of inmates in mental hospitals all over the country. There are sick minds and souls that can be helped mightily by medicine administered by the screen, whether it be laughter aroused by wholesome emotions or something like that finest of sermons preached by Spencer Tracy in *Captains Courageous* when he tells Freddie Bartholomew about his fisherman father, and the Savior who was the best fisherman of all. And I seem to remember that *Captains Courageous* was fairly good box-office.

Escapist? So What? . . .

ESCAPIST screen drama—so-called—may help us to escape something much worse. It stands to reason that we can more profitably spend our time visualizing things as they should be, and as we should like to have them, rather than things as they shouldn't be, and as we wish they weren't—if I make myself clear. A positive treatment is more apt to be successful than a negative treatment.

Small-Towner Speaking . . .

THERE are, however, several things we should like to escape from, such as: Class B pictures (Class B not because of the studio rating, but in the making), double-feature bills, Bank Nite, dishes and lamps, to mention just a few. Producers and exhibitors alike might be surprised to know how many of us groan

EDWARD LUDWIG

Directing

"THAT CERTAIN AGE"

Starring Deanna Durbin

for
Universal



if a picture we want to see happens to be shown on Bank Nite. And there are people who, although the picture may not attract them particularly, go to the theatre just for the sake of going somewhere, but first they inquire cautiously, "This isn't Bank Nite, is it?" And the double-feature—most of us heartily dislike it! We do not understand why we cannot have a feature and an artistically made musical short (not "artistically made")—one to complement the other.

The Eye vs. the Ear . . .

SPEAKING of shorts, that startling idea of screen commercials—or should I say "documentaries"?—fascinates me. There is this to be said for screen advertising as compared with radio: "The eye is eager—the ear is drowsy." True, radio reaches more people, but as a potential buyer I have a feeling that a product would be much more firmly registered in my mind if it were connected with some pleasing story that I had witnessed on the screen, than it is after I have listened to a sales talk, which, if it does not bore me so much that it fails to register at all, irritates me so that I would not buy the product on a bet. That goes for two-thirds of radio advertising. There is, of course, the other third that is perfectly satisfactory. I imagine there are motion picture directors who would find it interesting and rather exciting to be given a free hand to make, at moderate cost, pictures that have got what it takes, at the same time playing up (in an, oh, so subtle manner) the product being advertised. It would put the director on his mettle and give him a chance to prove what an art meticulous directing really is. Now, back to the potential buyer's side of it: Suppose we see a picture advertising a certain make of automobile. While the story takes us through beautiful country scenes, the lines of the car become familiar to us; there is fun and clever comedy, and, after the happy ending to the love story, we leave the theatre with the impression that a good time and a Blank car are synonymous. We have been reading our own personal feelings into the things we have seen (if there has not been too much dialogue)—interpreting them as we would like them to be—and we have a much kindlier feeling toward that particular make of car than we have after some radio supersalesman has tried to cram his car down our throat. (Always keeping in mind that not all radio programs do this.)

Pianos, Sheet Music— . . .

A MANUFACTURER of pianos and a music publisher might combine forces to make the public piano-conscious, which it certainly is not at the present time. A story of this kind could include a fine pianist and a vocalist of merit, but most important of all, it could show that a crowd of young people can have any amount of fun in a home where there is a piano and they can provide their own music. The songs featured *would not be heard on the radio* for a certain length of time, therefore people would buy them provided they were presented properly in the picture. Artistic merit and fun would be the com-



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ination that would sell the pianos and the sheet music. And food products—what mouth-watering screen stories could be written around that subject! When I first heard of screen commercials I was rather shocked and inclined to be antagonistic toward the idea. Now I am beginning to want to try them out.

Go After New Customers . . .

ANOTHER thing that I think the film industry should try out, is angling for a new type of theatre patron. In the past it has made something of a fetish of trying to attract the—the—oh, well, if I must—the “sophisticates”. (Will someone please provide a substitute for that word?) And, believe it or not, that type is not the most constant motion picture patron. It prefers something more s—sophisticated than the movies. . . . Screwy advertising is something else that should receive the attention of producers and exhibitors. I believe it has been a generally accepted idea—by the film industry at least—that the average mental age of motion picture patrons is fourteen years, or is it only twelve? If this were true, it would be anything but creditable to the industry, but it is not true. It might help the box-office situation a good bit if it were recognized that the personnel of the cinema audience has changed, and if that change were taken into consideration in the matter of picture advertising.

More Power and Glory . . .

BUT what would we do without the cinema? It means a great deal in the lives of most of us, and it will come to mean a great deal more to all of us as time goes on and we learn that colossal and gigantic are not the most important words in the English language; that words like simplicity and human interest pack a lot more box-office punch when it comes to a steady diet. Good workmanship is also a fine combination of words. . . . More power, more glory to the cinema!

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

WHATEVER the picture or story qualities of *Moonlight Sonata*, the London-made film, showing Paderewski at the piano and in conversation, it is a production which is worth seeing, if only as a personal record of the famous musician. What would we not give to see and hear Chopin play the pieces which Paderewski performs! We would forbear finding fault with the picture, the dialogue or the music, only for the opportunity of studying closely the features of the man whom we worship for his accomplishments. There are a number of pictures of Beethoven in existence. They are only portraits, and some of them not trustworthy portraits. The play of Beethoven's features, his height and deportment, his speech and, more so, his manner of playing, all are nothing but other men's impressions, and at times not even first-hand observations. There are few men of musical world-interest, such as Paderewski, who command such attention, yet there are

FRANCES HYLAND

AND

ALBERT RAY

wrote the screenplay for the following
1938 Twentieth Century-Fox releases:

Change of Heart

Island In the Sky

Keep Smiling
(soon to be released)

While New York Sleeps
(in production)

Running Wild
(in preparation)



Management

AD SCHULBERG - SAM JAFFE

living now men and women of the different arts who already are good "screen copy"—from a journalistic angle. Long may they "wave," but they will be good "copy" after they have ceased writing, painting, composing, singing or shaping a statue. Some day a man of vision will compile a screen serial, entitled *Men and Women in Yesteryear's News*. Men and women will not only come to see the men and women of yesteryear, but thereby live over their own lives.

Moonlight Sonata . . .

NO DOUBT, the human interest appeal of *Moonlight Sonata*, the Paderewski picture, has as much to do with its success as the music itself, performed by the illustrious Pole. Having seen Marie Tempest, the pre-eminent English actress on the London stage in her heyday, her presence for me enhances the film. I have heard better Chopin, Liszt and Beethoven renditions, better ones from this grand-seigneur of the piano whose performance before the sound-camera makes this device so valuable a means of obtaining cultural records. The Paderewski picture should have been made twenty years ago, when he still rendered bravura runs, when his tragedy-carved features did not bear the stamp of a Cassandra-nature who has foreseen pitiful events to come and has lived and suffered through them. I do not think it necessary to go into much detail regarding the recordings. Some of them in the first two-thirds of the title are tinny, others marred by too much echo. Staccato piano passages played with the sustaining pedal are not well recorded. There is too much echo, in accoustical terms, too much overtone, too little of the fundamental. The piano itself might have been adjusted better. Soft passages and legato episodes sound better, and the playing of the opening portion of the *Moonlight Sonata* to me, seeing Paderewski as well as hearing him, proved a deeply moving experience.

Exodus of Song Tunesmiths . . .

DEPARTURE of song writers from Hollywood for the reconstructed fleshpots of Egypt on the Hudson, will cause no violent weeping, except on the part of some headed eastwards. The men who review the shows on the big White Way do not accept the musical cliches and rhymed piffle most screen critics have allowed to pass these last ten years. The regrettable nature of the exodus is that executive Hollywood allows a withdrawal of some of the best musical song spinners and musical wits, while some of the worst of the nit-wits remain. It is said that among the popular tune inventors heading back for New York City are Irving Berlin and Cole Porter. They feel that Hollywood is not offering them opportunities worthy of their talents. In that regard the gentlemen named are right. A man may be able to write a scenario, but to write one in which songs occur naturally is a much more difficult task. A man capable of directing a film may not, and hardly ever does, realize sufficiently the difference between a story film and a musical. I would regret deeply to see Oscar Hammerstein II absent altogether from Holly-



Now Showing:

"PORT OF SEVEN SEAS"



Now Shooting:

"IF I WERE KING"



Now Scripting:

"BROADWAY MELODY OF 1939"



Preston Sturges



BEST WISHES

John Seitz
Lester White

Ray June
Leonard Smith

of the
M. G. M. Camera Department

WALDEMAR YOUNG

Writing for

(METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER)

wood. He is a show lyricist of the first order, a writer of humor, possessing genuine feeling. He is an author with an artistic capacity for the use of words in verse form, plus a good musical and dramatic sense. Alas, the dispensers of doggerel are still with us.

Only a Simile . . .

IF A manufacturer of leather goes into the shoe business in order to double profit on his leather, he will not sell many shoes unless he makes them of good leather. He will employ the best designers and stylists and not try to sell the same kind of shoes for all uses, in all cities and all climates. The fact that he merely changes the color of the buttons does not make the shoes different. If he is so foolish as to use hastily finished, inferior, cheap-grade leather for shoes with fancy buttons, he will find that fancy buttons notwithstanding, the number and size of buttons to the contrary, people will soon cease to buy his goods. That is what some of the colossal cobblers of Hollywood have done. They bought up control of publishing houses when the films began to sing. They started their own publishing houses. They bought fancy buttons (from crooners to Schnickelfritzies), including Tibbetts, Moores, Martinis, et al, but paid not enough attention to song quality. They were not in the business of improving music, but in the business of selling songs. Occasionally they engaged good song writers, and too often they hired third-rate ones who imitated the first-class ones across the street in a rival studio or in New York. Songs were made fast and feebly, "in the fashion" of the hour, until the hour of fashion was long past because a felicitous tune idea had been imitated to point of nausea.

And a Conclusion . . .

SALES fell off per song in the sheet music business conducted by the studios, so new songs were needed quickly, written quickly, and being song "quickies" quickly kept the cinema patrons at home. The substantial leather business of the films suffered, because movie executives were too interested in selling celluloid shoes. It may be sound business for a fried chicken and hamburger tycoon to raise his own birds and pigs, because he can feed his livestock from the slop-cans of his dishwashing department, but the same principle does not apply to the song and motion picture industry. The latter comes first. The song industry should be managed so independently that the men in charge of the business of publishing and selling songs could give the Zukors, Zannucks, Warners, Meyers, et al, "hell-and-Maria" for not turning out a better song product. But how can a movie president do that to himself? It happens "once in a life time." He cannot curse his song salesmen because he is manufacturing in his music department what they are to sell. He ought to get out of the song selling business. He ought to pay a good song publisher for giving him the devil about the trash he puts into the films. Then also cinema b.o. figures would rise.

To Welford Beaton

With Admiration



MARK SANDRICH

ROBERT YOUNG

Under Contract
to
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

"TOY WIFE"
"THREE COMRADES"
"JOSETTE"

EDMUND GOULDING

Director

(WARNER BROTHERS)

FRANK CAPRA

D I R E C T O R

“You Can’t Take It With You”



Hollywood

10 CENTS

SPECTATOR

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—August 20, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 15

On Guard, Guilds!

Interests of Creative Artists to
Need Watching During Period
of Film Shake-Up

Rushing Stars into Last-Minute
Pictures, Term Contracts,
Will Endanger Careers

... REVIEWS ...

FOUR DAUGHTERS ★ THE GLADIATOR ★ SING YOU SINNERS ★ MOONLIGHT SONATA
RICH MAN, POOR GIRL ★ SAFETY IN NUMBERS ★ THE MAN FROM MUSIC MOUNTAIN
ALWAYS IN TROUBLE ★ BLOCK-HEADS

ONLY PUBLICATION IN THE WORLD DEVOTED
EXCLUSIVELY TO PRACTICAL FILM CRITICISM



From the EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

CREATIVE BRAINS WILL FUNCTION . . .

WHEN the Department of Justice gets through with the film industry, and when block booking is a thing of the past, thus establishing an open market in which the best pictures will bring the highest prices, Hollywood's creative brains can begin to function at full capacity. At present the range of such brains is kept within the narrow limits of producer higher-ups' ability to think in terms of screen fundamentals. Among the two hundred and twenty producers, supervisors and associates whose names are on studio payrolls, perhaps ten per cent possess some knowledge of what it is all about, and probably will continue to carry on when the industry is purged of the business methods which President Roosevelt declared "stink to heaven." There are three main creative branches in picture production, directors, writers, players. Each branch has its own guild, well organized and capably managed, and, combined, the three constitute the power which will determine the future of pictures.

Directors Write Screen History . . .

ONE guild has struck a telling blow to effect its emancipation. The directors wrote screen history last month when they submitted to studio heads a dispassionate but vigorous denunciation of production methods. They drew attention to the "involved, complicated and expensive system of supervision which separates the director and writer from the responsible executive producers." The *Spectator's* views on the same point were set forth in its issue of February 12 last, when it said: "The studios have skilled people who could make better pictures than are being made, but between them and their opportunity to do so, stands a group of supervisors who nullify their efforts, who know nothing about screen writing or directing, but who dictate to both writers and directors." The directors acknowledge the contribution "of many individual producers who have given prodigiously to the industry," as the *Spectator* did: "Among so many production executives, of course, there are some competent ones."

Leaders Without Selfish Motives . . .

A SIGNIFICANT feature of the protest is the standing of the men who are active in the leadership of the Directors' Guild. Among them are Frank Capra, John Cromwell, W. S. Van Dyke, Frank Tuttle, Howard Hawks, Rowland V. Lee, Lewis Milestone, and others whose names and accomplishments are well known. As I wrote of them in the

Spectator of May 14, they are men who "can get (for themselves) everything they want from their employers merely for the asking. Why, then, are they giving long hours of their time, working far into the night, to increase the strength of the guild, to formulate its principles, to make its position clear to the producers? It cannot be for anything they themselves want, as each of them already has everything and none has a personal-importance complex. Their sole desire is to give a leg-up to those who have not climbed as far as they have."

Reason for Inferior Product . . .

WHEN all pictures were returning a profit and box-offices made all exhibitors happy, no one objected to block booking or to the odor of the industry's selling methods; but when conditions changed, when only class A product yielded respectable profits and audiences spurned most of the class B's, one would think the immediate concern of the industry would have been to put their best men on the product which needed them most. Let the directors tell you about class B pictures: "In the majority of cases the men in charge of those pictures are utterly unqualified. They have little respect for the medium, less respect for their audiences, and excuse their lack of imagination by ridiculing it in others. The result is inferior product." And another result, the guild might have said, is that the directors of the inferior product are blamed for its failure at the box-office. Class B directors suffer by virtue of the ineptitude of their supervisors, and class A supervisors shine in the reflected glory of their directors—that is, the great majority of the supervisors; there are such exceptions as I mentioned in the previous *Spectator*, Henry Blanke, and Joe Pasternak, as well as a few others.

Good Time to Make Demands . . .

THE Directors' Guild's indictment of production methods was formulated before there was any intimation that its delivery to producers would be coincidental with the action of the Department of Justice in starting court proceedings which eventually will revolutionize the conduct of the motion picture business. For the directors it was a happy coincidence. Wrongs of which they are complaining do not come within the scope of the court action, but while the producing organizations are being forced to retreat on all fronts, it is unlikely they will offer stubborn resistance to the demands for reform in their production methods, demands which are backed by such a powerful group as that which constitutes the Direc-

tors' Guild. It perhaps would not be good sportsmanship for the other two guilds to aim knockout blows while the industry still is stunned by the blow delivered by the Department of Justice, but I think it would be all right for them to sit on their adversary's stomach while he is down anyway from a blow they had no hand in administering, and gently coax him to grant the many concessions they feel justified in asking.

One for All; All for One . . .

WHILE the litigation is dragging its way slowly through the courts, the creative branches have time to size up the situation as it affects them and to determine how they can turn it most profitably to their own benefit. They will find, if they think wisely, that in the long run only what benefits the picture industry as a whole can benefit permanently those who compose its personnel. If the three guilds think solely in terms of the welfare of the entire industry, they will find they are doing the greatest service to the members of their organizations. That the leaders of the Directors' Guild had the best interests of the industry in mind is demonstrated by the wording of their bill of complaint; that picture executives have been thinking only of themselves is made evident by the conditions responsible for the action of the directors in drawing up the complaint. Only in the degree that the business of making pictures prospers can those who make them prosper.

Guilds Must Be On Guard . . .

WHEN the progress of the cases now pending in various courts makes it plain even to the present film barons that their despotic grasp of the film industry is loosening, there will be reason for the three guilds to be on guard for the protection of their members. There necessarily will be a time limit for the completion of the divorce of theatre ownership and picture production, one of the reforms insisted upon by the Department of Justice. During the period of grace granted the companies, contract players will be forced into a series of hurriedly made pictures made from hurriedly written scripts and with shortened shooting schedules which will be a handicap to directors. Players, writers and directors are judged more by the last picture each made than by those they have made previously, and in the hurry-up of the clean-up, reputations of box-office value may have their values lowered. Another thing creative workers must guard against is the lure of long-term contracts. A company which is being forced out of the production field would like to have among its assets a large number of contracts with directors, writers and players of proven box-office value. All contracts made hereafter should have a clause stipulating that they cannot be traded, sold or otherwise transferred to another firm or person. This is something the guilds should insist upon.

Guilds Will Dominate Production . . .

DURING the process of the industry's disintegration and reassembling, there will be need for watchfulness by the three guilds. As representatives of the three major branches of creative workers, they are in a position to dominate the production of pictures, and their value to their members will be determined by the degree of wisdom they display in wielding their power. It is essential they should present a united front. My confidence in the guilds' ability to serve their members wisely was expressed in the *Spectator* of February 5, when I wrote, "An interesting feature of the government of all three organizations is revelation of the existence in the ranks of the creative artists, of a group of able executives, in whose hands the welfare of the members is safe." Loyalty to the executives, as long as the conduct of their offices warrants it, is essential to the well being of creative workers when the present turmoil subsides and the new and permanent order of things is ushered in.

Important to Establish Names . . .

UNIT production, which the *Spectator* for years has maintained is the only system by which Hollywood can give the world a continuous supply of pictures of box-office value, will be one of the results of the present upheaval. Names then will mean even more than they do today. What trademark a commodity has, is not important; what matters is how well known it is and what guarantee it gives. Productions can be exploited as, "A Shirley Temple Picture," "A Frank Capra Production," "Another Dudley Nichols Screen Drama," and the box-office returns of the three will be equal if the names are equally well known and carry the same assurance of a maintained standard of entertainment value. During the period of readjustment, creative artists should give heed to the establishment of their names. They should recognize the fact now that the day of spectacular salaries is waning, that their future earnings will depend upon their box-office draw, not, as at present, upon the pleasure it gives one producer to bid higher for their services than any other producer feels like doing. Nominal salaries will be paid under the new conditions, the principal incomes of directors, writers and players being determined by the box-office returns on their pictures. Naturally those whose names are best known will make the most money as long as their work justifies the prominence of their names. This makes it good business for directors, writers and players to make their names well known. There will be plenty of capital available for unit production, and those whose names are well known, in Hollywood as elsewhere, will have no difficulty in obtaining backing if they wish to make their own pictures and take advantage of the open market the abolition of block booking will establish.

The time to start building names is now; the place to start, Hollywood, for it is to Hollywood that capital will come in search of names.

* * *

HE SEEMS TO LIKE US . . .

WITH a check from a new subscriber comes a note: "I want the *Spectator* regularly because it is the only paper intelligent enough to see the weaknesses of *Marie Antoinette* and honest enough to give expression to them."

* * *

HOW TO PICK THE WINNERS . . .

WHO says there is no system by which one can beat the races? The subject is one which can be discussed legitimately in a film publication as for the duration of the three race meetings which take place yearly within a short distance of Hollywood, the thoughts of the people responsible for the quality of the nation's screen entertainment are on the horses more than on the pictures. In many instances this works to the advantage of the pictures, although the general effect is harmful. The *Spectator* is devoted solely to the improvement of the quality of Hollywood's output, and in line with that policy I feel it my duty to acquaint picture people with a betting system, one which has been tested and found faultless, which makes short work of selecting winners and thus permits studio workers to think less of horses and more of their work. I claim I can speak with authority by virtue of my regular attendance at race tracks, having been once at Santa Anita, once at Inglewood and once at Del Mar.

Here Is the System . . .

RECENTLY the Paramount publicity department was host to picture reviewers on an excursion to Del Mar, one of the best organized and highly enjoyable affairs of the kind it has been my pleasure to experience in my dozen years of contact with the film industry. As Phil Scheuer, who writes so gracefully and discerningly for *Los Angeles Times*, could not make the early train, Connie, his charming wife, was entrusted to the care of Mrs. Spectator and me. When we reached the track, and I had purchased a program, Connie remarked that she had been at Santa Anita once and could pick all the winners, so she went over the day's entries with me and I checked off her selections for the entire eight races. I lost my bet on the first race, won the second, lost the third, and won on the next four. She had not been sure which of two horses would win the eighth, so I bet on the two of them for place and cashed in on both, thus winning on six of the eight races and twice on one of them, which was plenty good enough for me and had the additional advantage of saving me the mental anguish involved in picking winners. My system? Oh, just ask Connie.

* * *

CHICKENS ARE HOMEWARD BOUND . . .

METRO'S exploitation of Norma Shearer is backfiring. The extreme folly of characterizing her as "The First Lady of the Screen" is being demonstrated

by the flood of indignant fan letters she and the studio are receiving. Metro is presuming too much in telling me Norma is the first lady of the screen when my first lady may be Barbara Stanwyck, Madge Evans, Jeanette MacDonald, Margaret Sullivan, Joan Crawford, or any one of a score of others. It is on a par with the atrocious taste of Louella Parsons in permitting herself to be termed "The First Lady of Hollywood" in a weekly radio broadcast. I happen to be married to the first lady of Hollywood, as you are, and you. The devoted fans of one star resent another's being arbitrarily set on a higher pedestal. Norma's *Marie Antoinette*'s exploitation has been made glamorous at the expense of the picture as a whole, and has put her in the position of being charged with responsibility for the production's disappointing box-office record.

What to Do With Norma . . .

WHEN *Marie* was launched, the exploitation was dignified and somewhat cold, quite in keeping with the mood of the production. When attendance proved less than expected, exploitation took on a sex complexion—"A queen whom all the kings of Europe loved," or something of the sort; and that proving to lack force as a box-office stimulant, dignity again was resorted to with no better results. Feminine psychology figures her only as a sophisticated child of luxury, a girl who did not rise from rags to riches, and one far removed from the stenographers and shop workers who form such a considerable portion of film theatre audiences. They have grown to resent her, as her fan mail reveals, and the glory surrounding her in *Marie Antoinette* does nothing to lessen the degree of resentment. If Metro is to realize fully on Norma as an asset, it should present her in two or three down-to-earth stories in which she plays poverty stricken girls in neat, but not gaudy, gowns. What would go a long way towards restoring the popularity to which her talents entitle her, would be to present her in a picture in which her idea of heavenly bliss would be a two-room apartment shared with the handsome taxi driver she loves so dearly. We have seen enough of Norma pouring tea in the drawing room. Let us see her making it in the kitchen for someone else to pour.

* * *

BY A MORE DIRECT ROUTE . . .

SEEMS to me that more permanent good would be done if instead of spending one million dollars advertising the slogan, "Movies Are Your Best Entertainment," producers would devote all their thought and energy to making movies our best entertainment.

* * *

WHAT A SHIRT CAN TEACH . . .

THERE is a line of dialogue in the recently previewed MGM picture, *Rich Man, Poor Girl*, which would serve as a text for a cinematic sermon. The present box-office slump is due largely to the fact that the majority of pictures deal with themes which have little application to the everyday affairs of peo-

ple generally and which, therefore, lack universal appeal. *Rich Man, Poor Girl* is outside the range of such criticism. It deals with a rich family and a poor family, consequently all of us can project ourselves into it, as each of us belongs to either family. In the picture the members of the poor family are bestirring themselves to don their best attire to receive a visit from the rich man. Lew Ayres finds it necessary to iron his other shirt. He grumbles rebelliously, "A clean shirt! This will throw me off my schedule for a week!" Seldom does one hear such a roar of genuine laughter as that which greeted this speech when the picture was previewed. It is not a brilliant speech, one which has either wit or meaning as an isolated fragment; but its reception was explosive because of its very down-to-earthness, because in some of its variations it sharply focuses situations in which all of us have found ourselves at one time or another.

Comes As a Surprise . . .

THE genesis of the humor in Ayres' speech lies in the surprise it gives you. Perhaps you have been down to two shirts and to meet a crisis have had to iron on Wednesday the one you were in the habit of ironing on Saturday. You imagine no one else has had a similar experience; or perhaps it is that you give no thought to the possibility of anyone else's having had it. Then suddenly before you on the screen you see another fellow who has had to do the same thing; it hits you between the eyes and you roar with laughter. Translate shirt-ironing in terms of other intimate human experiences and you will find some of your own among them. It is what we see in the *Rich Man* scene that gives what we hear its comedy value. We are getting too much of the other kind of comedy, that which we have to listen to and digest mentally before we get the point. And we are getting too many aloof themes, too much *Marie Antoinette* and not enough *Mary Jones*; too much drawing room and not enough kitchen. The shirt of Lew Ayres can teach us a lot if only we are willing to learn.

* * *

TRIBUTE FROM AN AUTHORITY . . .

AMONG the best known exhibitors in the country is John Hamrick, of Seattle, who owns a large number of theatres in the Northwest and operates a number in cooperation with Fox-West Coast. He says: "*Hollywood Spectator* reviews of pictures are of more value to exhibitors than those appearing in any other publication. As an aid in our selection of pictures and their exploitation before showing we find the *Spectator* of great service. It has a place on the table at every one of our executive conferences."

* * *

BIT OF BEAUTIFUL DIRECTION . . .

RECENTLY at a preview I caught part of *Always Goodbye* which was previewed while I was away on a holiday jaunt. It contains one of the most beautiful bits of direction I have seen in a long time. Barbara Stanwyck plays the mother of a boy who

has been adopted by Ian Hunter; Herbert Marshall is in love with Barbara. I missed the sequences which show why Hunter has Barbara's son and does not know her relation to the boy. The direction I refer to comes in a scene in which Barbara tells Marshall she is going to take the boy from Hunter and Marshall tells her that she must not, that the boy must never know she is his mother. Barbara has a battle with herself; she walks up-stage and back again; is about to protest, does not; Marshall sits at his desk, tapping its top absently with a pencil; not a word is spoken by either of them as the young mother wrestles with her problem. It is the longest silent scene of the kind I have seen in a talkie, yet filmic motion, the life blood of screen art, flows through it to hold the closest attention of the audience. We can see in Barbara's eyes the battle between her love for her son and conditions which make it unwise for her to claim him; we see duty conquer even before she quietly says, "You're right." If Barbara's argument with herself had been one of words with Marshall, as similar scenes are presented in all other talkies, the scene would not have been half as impressive. Talkie technique never can have the emotional appeal of true cinematic technique. Credit for writing the scene in voiceless screen language belongs to Kathryn Scola and Edith Skouras; for the exhibition of brilliant direction to Sidney Lanfield.

* * *

PURELY AN ADVERTISEMENT . . .

BY THE time the film industry finds itself on an even keel after what will be its tumultuous passage through the legal storm abreast of it now, it will be found that picture brains will be in more demand than ever before, that people who can think in terms of cinematic principles will rule the cinematic roost. To take advantage of the opportunities the new conditions will present, it would be a good idea for people now in pictures to learn what pictures really are, to get inside them and find out what makes them tick or prevents them from ticking. The *Spectator*, the only film publication which thinks some knowledge of the screen is not necessarily a handicap to those following screen careers, is suggested as a steady course in reading.

* * *

NIVEN, ON FAKING . . .

DAVID NIVEN is not content merely to give intelligent performances in motion pictures; he supplements his acting by thinking intelligently in terms of motion pictures. He has beaten me to something I had intended to write about myself, and puts it more tersely than I probably would have. I will now make my exit, clearing the stage to give you a chance to hear what he wrote me in a recent note. Enter David. He speaks: "I have been away a good deal during the last year so consequently have missed a lot of suggestions put forward by unimportant people like myself for the improvement of box-office receipts. If I am being repetitious, forgive me. One of my earliest recollections as a movie-goer was as a child watching while the alligators in the moat sur-

rounding somebody's palace suddenly turned into swans. Why they performed this peculiar evolution I cannot quite remember, but what I do remember is my eyes popping out of my head while they did it right before me on the screen. So-called 'faking' has always been such a grand mystery to the average movie-goer, and has been brought to such a fine art by those expert in that line, that it seems a shame we should now allow our little tricks to become common knowledge. Good conjurers don't give away a damn thing. Today, every time I pick up a magazine I am told, with still pictures for proof, how we 'fool' the public. Can nothing be done to exterminate these human gophers? I am sure that very few people would go to see *The Hurricane* if they had been told beforehand that it was all done by John Ford in a rubber bathtub with the help of C. Aubrey Smith and a pair of bellows. Not that it was, of course, and being under contract to Samuel Goldwyn, I would not mention it if it had been."

* * *

COMFORT IN THE THOUGHT . . .

THOSE who have their stakes in pictures, whose fortunes fluctuate with the fortunes of the film industry, have no reason to be uneasy about what the future holds for them. No matter what the Department of Justice does to the industry, there is comfort in the thought that it is not humanly possible for any new management after the upheaval is over to be as bad as that which made the upheaval inevitable.

* * *

SHIRLEY THE ONLY ONE . . .

HOW many people are there in Hollywood who merely by making a trip across the continent, could stir the big news organizations into watching their every step and wiring news of it to all the daily papers from border to border and coast to coast? Only one. How many, if they hit Washington, would be asked to call on the President? Perhaps half a dozen. How many would be greeted by the mayors of all the cities they visited, would be followed through the streets by great crowds of admirers? Only one. Who else is enshrined so strongly in the hearts of the public that when she returns from Bermuda and says that while there she enjoyed a ride on the back of a tortoise, her remark is considered so newsworthy that it is put on the wires and appears in all the papers? No one else; only Shirley Temple. The public acclaim of Shirley came in spite of genuine attempt to avoid it. Shirley's father and mother assured me a short time before the trip began, that it was for the purpose of letting her see America without being seen, and George, her father, told me of the precautions that were to be taken to keep the party's movements out of the papers. But Shirley is news, and news will out. Dimples and a cheerful smile cannot account for Shirley's popularity. She is the world's pet because she is the world's greatest actress, and she is that because she knows nothing about acting. The greatest tribute to her genius is that her popularity has persisted in spite of her ap-

pearances in a long line of trashy pictures which reveal her studio's lack of comprehension of her possibilities.

* * *

PAST AND PRESENT SLUMPS . . .

ONE of the *Spectator's* good friends writes me a letter in which he says: "You claim that the present box-office slump is due to the failure of the talkie form to hold the audience it had established. Don't you recall that just prior to the switch from silents to talkies, there was a similar falling off in box-office receipts? Doesn't that make it appear that the silents also failed to hold the audience they had established?" I do recall the slump of the silents, and I recall also the reason for it, a reason which in no way applies to the failure of talkies to sustain the box-office. Just before sound came, producers of pictures were afflicted with stock market fever; their minds were on ticker tape and not on reels of film; pictures became monotonously alike, were made carelessly and the public grew tired of them. It is the reverse with the present talkies. Never in its history has the film industry made better pictures than it has been releasing, while box-office receipts have been falling off steadily. That would seem to support the *Spectator's* contention that the talkie form is not holding its audience, for if the form had merit, it follows that box-office figures would improve as the talkie quality improved. The present slump is fulfillment of the *Spectator's* six-year-old prediction that the all-talkie form would not hold the audience the early talkies established. Only by reduction to a minimum of audible dialogue will picture production maintain an even level of prosperity. Hollywood's business is one of making motion pictures, not of photographing conversations.

* * *

WRITERS AND ORIGINAL STORIES . . .

ONE of the craziest things about the crazy film business is the rating of the value to it of a writer on the basis of the fame he has achieved in some other medium—the novel, short story, stage play. If A, who never has written for any other medium, sells an original for the screen, he is lucky if he gets \$2,000 for it. If B has attracted attention in other fields and writes his first original for the screen, he is unluckily if he gets only \$20,000 for it. But things have a way of righting themselves. It will not be so very long before a writer's value to the screen will be rated solely on the basis of his previous contributions to it. Then we will have better pictures and writers with picture brains will make oodles of money.

* * *

IS NOT AN ACTING ART . . .

ONE of the twelve-year-old contentions of the *Spectator* is that the screen is not an acting art. Being translated into practical terms, it means the business of the film industry is selling personalities, not acting. If you doubt it, scan the list of box-office ratings and see how far down it you have to go before you find the names of those who are recognized as our greatest actors and actresses. Also study

box-office figures and learn what poor business has been done by pictures whose principal assets were outstanding performances.

* * *

PICTURES AND THEIR PEOPLE . . .

MOVING Bob Florey up to A director ranks is a sensible thing Paramount has done. . . . You may put Judy Garland down as one who will develop great box-office strength. . . . There are rumors around that the picture now nearing the cutting room will prove to be Deanna Durbin's greatest; when only little pictures were rungs in the ladder Edward Ludwig, Deanna's present director, was climbing, and the *Spectator* predicted he would reach the top. . . . Now that Madge Evans is scoring hits in Eastern plays, I suppose some alert talent scout will discover her and bring her back to pictures. . . . While I was dining at the Hollywood Brown Derby, my eyes roamed around and I wished I could see again on the screen a few score of yesterday's favorites whose caricatures I saw on the walls. The neglect of those who have served producers well is not something of which Hollywood has reason to be proud. . . . I wish that just once Dorothy Lamour would let her voice go full blast. I like the quality her voice reveals as she sings softly, but it makes me curious. . . . Because the appetite of the public has been dulled by pictures upon which Hollywood has spent millions, such pictures as *Mother Carey's Chickens*, *Love Comes to Andy Hardy*, *Four Daughters* will not yield returns they would under different circumstances, but more of the same kind would do more to start the drift back to the box-office than the industry's million-dollar ballyhoo will do. I see "motion pictures" has been substituted for "movies" to remove the MAYBE initials from the ballyhoo's slogan, but still it is a decidedly maybe proposition. . . . Century could not make a better choice of a Charlie Chan than that excellent actor, Noah Beery. Remember his outstanding performance in that Foreign Legion picture? . . . Gale Page, the beautiful, gentle, soft-spoken girl who says so much with her eyes and smile, given half a chance, soon will have a vast army of fans, the vanguard of which will be those who see her in *Four Daughters*. . . . Another girl who has made a promising start in pictures is Ellen Drew who will make a hit in *Sing You Sinners*, Bing Crosby's latest, and the honors of which he shares with Fred MacMurray. . . . John Littel is among the most effortless actors we have; seems to register his points with some inward quality which needs little physical help; impresses me more with every appearance, no matter how modest the part. . . . Strange that no producer has brains enough to make a picture with a cast composed entirely of the old silent favorites who now occasionally play bits in talkies, a picture that would not be ballyhooed to death as a round-up of such favorites, thus giving talkie patrons the feeling it would have no attraction for them, but which would be advertised in the usual way and would permit the old silent patrons to be made more happy by finding their old friends

again. . . . *Algiers* was previewed while I was away on a holiday trip; caught it at the Four Star; excellent picture, its greatest performance that of Gene Lockhart whose penetrating study of a slimy double-crosser is a screen masterpiece.

* * *

CHARLIE VERSUS MORTIMER . . .

ED SCHALLERT, in *Los Angeles Times*, suggests that Mortimer, the latest addition to Edgar Bergen's family, may put Charlie McCarthy's nose out of joint by supplanting him in the hearts of their countrymen. I do not agree with Ed. A grotesque character man cannot compete with a well established leading man. Mortimer is a freak, Charlie a person, our best loved American.

* * *

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

TRIED to be lazy this morning and not go for our walk, but the pleading look in the eyes of the Spaniel was too much for me; he led me out through the big gate and down the dirt road until we turned in among the apricot trees and followed the corridors their foliage makes. The work of the trees is over for the year, their abundant crop picked and shipped, and only here and there a yellow dot on the field of green means an apricot that was overlooked. I picked one and gave one to Freddie, who will eat anything that I will. On the way home he touched noses with a cow and seemed tremendously proud of his daring. . . . New York gave Howard Hughes a home-coming reception, Houston gave him a home-coming reception, Los Angeles gave him a home-coming reception; then he went home. . . . Every morning after breakfast, Mrs. Spectator with her scissors and basket, makes a tour of the garden, then goes into the house and wonders where under the sun she can put all the fresh flowers. . . . This afternoon I approached the gate to greet a distinguished Eastern writer and his wife. Behind me trailed, in solemn procession, Sophie and her six ducklings; Percy and Minnie, the kittens we have left of the litter a neighborhood cat wished on us, and along the boundary lines of the driveway, the Spaniel and the Peke rode herd on all of us. As a round-up it was impressive, but as a dignified social greeting it was a bust. . . . Our wistaria vine has had remarkable growth this summer; seems to be headed for San Francisco and points north. . . . A huge machine has just snorted past, smoothing the surface of our dirt road. I don't like it. When the road is smooth, too many cars come along it. . . . Freddie, with supreme effort, has humped his way from the sun to the shade and now is pointing a languid toenail at the hideout of a flea. . . . While listening to the radio broadcast of New York's reception to Douglas Corrigan I thought what a fine thing it is that for a moment we can forget politics and business and let ourselves go in paying tribute to a hitherto unknown young fellow. . . . Our young fig tree, which bore eleven figs last year, is whooping it up in great style this summer; going to have quite a crop. . . . Its next

door neighbor, the young loquat tree, seems to remain entirely indifferent to the pleasure I derive from picking and eating loquats, but is putting on a great show in the way of growth and richness of foliage. . . . Afternoon is waning, and in the garden there is the quiet that is made by the lazy chirpings of birds and their starting of songs they lack the energy to finish; it is warm even in the shade of the locust tree under which I am writing. A dozen feet away is a comfortable hammock which a teasing air current is swaying gently. Ho, hum! Can't stop yawning. Think I'll have a nap. The hammock is so com . . . for . . . ta . . .

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

STRAIGHTENING OUT A KINK . . .

BY ONE of those accidents which will happen in a printing establishment when someone becomes careless, a paragraph in my review in the last *Spectator* of *The Crowd Roars* got badly balled up. With a prayer that the printer will lend his cooperation, I herewith seek to repair the damaged part of the review by making it read as I wrote it: "The girl escapes and races to Madison Square Garden. Will she get there before the eighth round starts? Of course, you know she will, for in motion pictures they always do, but the knowledge will not keep you from getting terrifically excited; and when she dashes into the Garden with not more than a minute to spare, your impulse is to jump to your feet and cheer her. Good old hokum, but you love it. And as Maureen O'Sullivan is the girl Bob is fighting for, you are doubly anxious to see everything turn out all right. Pictures I review in this *Spectator* have brought to the screen three of my greatest screen loves, Ann Shirley, Ruby Keeler, and Maureen. Just by being themselves they always please me mightily. Consequently my reviewing task has been particularly pleasant."

* * *

YOU'LL LOVE THE LEMPS . . .

● **FOUR DAUGHTERS**; WB-FN; executive producer, Hal B. Wallis; associate producer, Henry Blanke; director, Michael Curtiz; dialogue director, Irving Rapper; original story, Fannie Hurst; screen play, Julius J. Epstein and Lenore Coffee; musical director, Leo F. Forbstein; art director, John Hughes; photographer, Ernie Haller; music, Max Steiner. Cast: Priscilla Lane, Rosemary Lane, Lola Lane, Gale Page, Claude Rains, John Garfield, Jeffrey Lynn, Dick Foran, Frank McHugh, May Robson, Vera Lewis, Tom Dugan, Eddie Acuff, Donald Kerr.

ONE you must see. It is not a story. When the blossoms are on the cherry trees in the front yard of their house on the small town street—the street Mrs. Ridgefield lives on—we move in on the Lemps and remain with them until the blossoms come again. Perhaps if we had gone a little farther along the street we might have found a more interesting family, for certainly none of the Lemps—a father, four motherless girls, an aunt—is in any way extraordinary. But, anyway, we've moved in, and we stay to

see what will happen. Nothing really does happen—that is, nothing worth telling anyone who does not know the Lemps—but we get to know them, know them so well that we are interested when we discover that Aunt Etta darns the socks of Ernst, the young fellow who lives next door and is speechlessly in love with Emma Lemp. Now, darning socks is not big news, nor is the fact that the wardrobes of the four daughters are so scanty that when one of them dolls up completely for a social function, the others have to stay home, but when you become intimately acquainted with the members of the family, fall in love with them, such little things interest you tremendously.

Acting Honors Are Even . . .

ONLY expert writing, directing and acting could make a cinematic event of such an eventless story. As I look back on it I recall no high spots, no one illuminating bit, which came to the front so vividly that the rest of the pattern receded. The one player who stands out most vividly is John Garfield, who attracts attention by virtue of having the most colorful characterization and holds it by virtue of his display of great acting ability. But every member of the cast is as perfect in his or her way as is Garfield. That is one of the wonders Mike has performed—telling his story with a family and its friends and not with individuals, keeping the family intact as a unit and retaining our interest in it as such. I am not distributing individual praise to members of the cast. I cannot express perfection in so many different ways. But I must mention Max Steiner's great contribution, his music strengthening greatly the emotional appeal of the picture. John Hughes' art direction and Ernie Haller's photography also deserve praise.

Grandma's Patchwork Quilt . . .

SO FEELINGLY has Michael Curtiz woven his material that what we see on the screen is a homespun pattern which, materialized, is fit companion for grandma's patchwork quilt whose gay colors are softened by those more sober until the whole becomes a creation of quiet dignity. There are gay colors in *Four Daughters*, splashes of humor which make you laugh; softly sober colors, emotional spots which make you cry; but there is nothing so gay that you cannot restrain your laughter or so poignant that your tears will blind you. The gentleness of its appeal is what gives the picture such power to entertain—the feeling it gives you that it so easily



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could be altered a little and be about you and your family. It has no hero, heroine, villain; no complicated plot, dramatic high-spots, smashing climaxes. It is just granny's quilt with human beings for patches. It is proof, too, of the truth of the opinion I have expressed so often, that in a motion picture the story is not important, that what determines its worth as entertainment is the manner in which what story it has is presented on the screen.

Hal, Henry and Mike . . .

HAL WALLIS, whose stature as a producer is growing constantly, has on his staff, in Henry Blanke, one of the few production geniuses in Hollywood; and to Henry Hal assigned *Four Daughters*; and to Julius Epstein and Lenore Coffee Henry assigned the writing of the *Four Daughters* script, and under his watchful guidance a workable script came forth. What would have appeared to me to be a chance that Henry was taking was his selection of Mike Curtiz to direct. There is none of the swash-buckling vigor of *Captain Blood*, none of the heroic physical daring of *The Charge of the Light Brigade* nor the stirring pugilism of *Kid Galahad*, to mention but a few of Mike's successes, in the script Henry gave Mike to shoot. But what comes to the screen just goes to show what an old softie Mike is, after all—at heart a romanticist, a sentimental fellow with a sly sense of humor, one who can feel a simple story and make us feel it. At the preview he sat in the seat in front of me. Before the picture started I leaned over and told him I hoped he had the greatest picture of his career. When the showing was over, I leaned forward again and told him he had.

BING THERE WITH A BANG . . .

● **SING YOU SINNERS**; Paramount picture and release; produced and directed by Wesley Ruggles; co-stars Bing Crosby and Fred MacMurray; story and screen play by Claude Binyon; photographed by Carl Struss; art direction, Hans Dreier and Ernst Fegte; edited by Alma Ruth Macrorie; sound recording, Earl Hayman and Don Johnson; interior decorations, A. E. Freudeman; musical direction, Boris Morros; vocal arrangements by Max Terr; assistant director, Arthur Jacobson; songs, "Small Fry," music and lyrics by Hoagy Carmichael and Frank Loesser, and sung by Crosby, MacMurray and Donald O'Connor; "Don't Let That Moon Get Away," music and lyrics by James V. Monaco and John Burke, and sung by Crosby; "Pocketful of Dreams," music and lyrics by Monaco and Burke, and sung by Crosby, MacMurray and O'Connor; "Laugh and Call It Love," music and lyrics by Monaco and Burke, and sung by Crosby, MacMurray and O'Connor. Supporting cast: Donald O'Connor, Elizabeth Patterson, Ellen Drew, John Gallaudet, William Heade, Paul White, Irving Bacon, Tom Dugan and Herbert Corthell.

BING'S best. Best because he has a definite characterization which permits his presentation as an actor in a part to which his singing is incidental, and not as a singer to whose songs his acting is incidental. It must be all of seven or eight years ago that the *Spectator* first said of Bing that his personality would make him a screen favorite if he never sang a song. I have been waiting that long to see him get a part such as he has in *Sing You Sinners*, but in all the pictures in which he has appeared his acting has

entertained me more than his singing. The singing I took for granted, got used to it, knew it was coming; but there were always fresh developments, definite steps forward in his acting. To me Bing is the ideal screen actor because he knows nothing about acting and never suggests the actor. He is just a clean young fellow with enough gumption to know he is in a profitable racket, and with enough honesty to give the racket as much as possible for the money it pays him. Years ago I told him his singing would not make him a big box-office star, but that his personality would. See *Sing You Sinners* and I think you will agree that my guess was a good one.

Story a Simple One . . .

THE picture is good entertainment because of the simplicity of its story. It tells us of wholly unimportant things which happen to wholly unimportant people, a recital you would yawn over if you heard it in real life about real people; but the skill of Claude Binyon, who wrote the story directly for the screen; the direction of Wesley Ruggles, who never before revealed such a human touch; the natural, easy and convincing performances of a carefully selected cast, plus the complete production Paramount has given it and the artistic photography of Karl Struss—all these elements have been combined to make a thoroughly pleasing bit of screen entertainment. The songs come into the story naturally and are part of it. Bing plays a perfectly sane young fellow who is crazy—if you catch what I mean; a will-o'-the-wisp young fellow who does not see the opportunity at his feet because his gaze is fixed on a more distant one. Fred MacMurray is his more practical brother; Donald O'Connor, a promising youngster, is little brother of the two of them, and that grand actress, Elizabeth Patterson, is mother of the lot. Ellen Drew is the girl, in love with Fred and given no relatives by Binyon, who apparently wanted no excess baggage to slow the progress of the story.

Exciting Horse Race Sequence . . .

STRANGE and interesting is the power of the screen to make us see importance in unimportant things happening to unimportant people, to make us weep with one shadow on the screen and laugh with another, to keep us on the edge of our seat, tense, excited, hoping the hero's horse will win the race and bring prosperity to the family we have become interested in so keenly. That is what *Sing You Sinners*

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will do to you. It also will make you laugh, and will show you a darned good rough-and-tumble fight between two gangsters and our two brothers, Bing and Fred, although I think we could enjoy the fight better if we could tell at all times who was doing what to whom. We see and hear the four mixing it, but the ebb and flow of the tide of battle mean nothing to us until it is over. It is different with the horse race. It is the best directed, photographed and most exciting sequence of the kind I have seen on the screen. But the main strength of the picture is its underlying, deeply human note which Wesley's direction sustains throughout the length of the film.

WILL PLEASE MR. BROWN'S FANS . . .

● **THE GLADIATOR**; Columbia-David L. Loew; associate producer, Edward Gross; director, Edward Sedgwick; screen play, Charlie Melson and Arthur Sheekman; novel, Philip Wylie; adaptation, James Mulhauser and Earle Snell; additional dialogue, George Marion, Jr.; photographer, George Schneiderman; film editor, Robert Crandall; art director, Albert D'Agostino; song, "On to Victory," Walter G. Samuels and Charles Newman; musical director, Victor Young. Cast: Joe E. Brown, Man Mountain Dean, June Travis, Dickie Moore, Lucien Littlefield, Robert Kent, Ethel Wales, Donald Douglas, Lee Phelps, Eddie Kane, Wright Kramer.

WILL not disappoint dyed-in-the-wool Joe E. Brown fans. It is the best story Joe has had for quite a spell, one with human touches and bits of sentiment sprinkled through a procession of highly hilarious scenes. In addition to Joe it has the pleasing presence of June Travis, a girl whose screen appearances I always have liked. A funny wrestling sequence is decorated with the huge presence of Man Mountain Dean. When the picture was being shot, Joe hobbled on crutches into the Beverly Brown Derby to have a snack with me after a preview. Judging by what I saw in his picture, it is a wonder that he was not conveyed to the Derby in an ambulance and carried in on a stretcher. What he will do for his art entitles him to a Carnegie medal. And his art would be wise if it would do more than it does for him. It is not Joe's clowning which has held his big audience together for so long a time; his strength is his acting ability and the human appeal of his sympathetic personality. He could be sold as an emotional actor, but has been offered only as a clown.

Not Doing Right By Joe . . .

LOOSE construction always has been a feature of Joe's stories. *The Gladiator* story is no exception. The comedy scenes are well written and realize all their laugh-provoking possibilities, but they are held together by story sequences which carry no conviction. Joe enters college, and for no reason that even is hinted at, immediately becomes the victim of the distorted sense of humor of the entire student body. When the story demands a misunderstanding between June Travis and Robert Kent in order to motivate Kent's persecution of Joe, we have a scene, in the middle of the floor at a varsity dance, in which Kent shouts insults at the girl in a vulgar, ill-bred manner—a scene about as foreign to the atmosphere of a

varsity dance as one could be. No doubt the producer would argue that Joe's audience would give no thought to a little thing like that. Granted. But if so many things of that sort were not in Joe's pictures, people who would give thought to them, would be added to the audience. Joe's comedy is funny enough to entertain discriminating picture goers, but his pictures contain so many scenes comparable to the one I mention, that enduring them is too great a price to pay for the laughter his comedy talents can provoke. It is as if the producer were deliberately keeping Joe's audience down to those who are content with clowning and lack the intelligence to appreciate a logically told story.

Joe Could Be Gold Mine . . .

WITHOUT the addition of a single penny to the production cost of *The Gladiator* or any change in the sequence of scenes or alterations in the story, the picture could have become one which would please an audience composed solely of high-brows. There is no one so absorbed in his own intellect that he is impervious to the comedy appeal of something funny. As it is, and for all its loose telling, the *Gladiator* story raises a point which challenges the intellect: What could happen if Man suddenly acquired physical strength which for size and weight, was equal to that of an ant or grasshopper? An ant can lift a bewildering number of times its own weight, and a grasshopper can jump an equally bewildering number of times its own height. What if Man could duplicate such feats? In the picture Lucien Littlefield (clever, neglected actor) develops a serum which gives Man such power and injects it in Joe. There we have a theme of intellectual significance, but which in its presentation on the screen is kept down to the level of those who can appreciate only clowning. Joe E. Brown could be a box-office gold mine if he could get a producer who could realize it and knew how to go about it.

MUSIC PART OF STORY . . .

● **MOONLIGHT SONATA**; produced by Pall Mall Productions, Ltd.; director, Lothar Mendes; screen play, Edward Knoblock. Cast: Ignace Jan Paderewski, Charles Farrell, Baroness Lindenberg, Marie Tempest.

NOW in the the ninth week of its successful run at the Esquire, this picture, which comes to us from England, is an interesting demonstration of success being achieved by a creation of screen art because it gains its emotional appeal by leaning heavily on the emotion producing power of a sister art, the art of music, which always must play a big part in screen entertainment. Paderewski plays the Moonlight Sonata, and the appeal of his gorgeous playing is emphasized by the place the composition has in the story; and the appeal of the picture likewise is strengthened by the story's reliance upon the composition. *Moonlight Sonata* is a charming picture, one which I think will take its place among those your memory will cling to as its charm sifts through the long procession of those you will see and forget.

Mounted handsomely, distinguished for the best of taste it reveals, directed with fine understanding which develops its emotional possibilities without stressing them, it comes to the screen as one of those quiet little masterpieces Hollywood can study to its advantage.

Ending Revealed At Beginning . . .

A *DEPARTURE* in story construction is an early sequence which shows us how the romance ends. Before the boy asks the girl to marry him, we see them as a married couple, and then the story goes back and pursues its way to the ending we know. The picture opens with Paderewski giving a piano recital, a long sequence superbly directed by Lothar Mendes to accentuate the emotional appeal of the master's playing. In the long ago his caressing fingers had made the *Moonlight Sonata* play a part in the romance of the girl's father and mother. It is played again to bring the boy and girl together as the picture ends, an intensely dramatic sequence in which the great playing of the great composition provides the drama. The girl thinks she had wrecked the real romance because she thought she loved a man who turned out to be a scoundrel. She writes a farewell note to the boy and is about to end it all, but there comes to her the notes of the *Sonata* played again by the great artist who was responsible for her mother's happiness; and then, as she hesitates, the boy comes to her, slowly, and for a long time they stand, just looking at one another; the night is filled with the music which flows from the master's heart to put feeling in his fingers, and, without a word having been spoken, the boy's arms go around the willing girl—the most beautiful ending I can remember among the thousands I have seen.

Paderewski Satisfactory Actor . . .

A *SURPRISE* the picture holds is the satisfactory performance by Paderewski from whom we could have expected but little. He plays himself, of course, which in any event, puts his performance beyond criticism, but he plays the kindly old gentleman in a manner to endear himself to us, and that is all we can expect from the most experienced actor. That grand veteran, Marie Tempest, whom I last saw in London nearly a quarter of a century ago, is splendid as the girl's grandmother, while the girl herself, Miss Lindenberg, plays her part ably. Charlie Farrell is the boy and gives a good performance. All through the picture the direction of Lothar Mendes maintains a high level of excellence. . . . I was late

in seeing *Moonlight Sonata*, as there were so many new pictures being previewed in recent weeks that the occasional previewless nights made home and pipe and books look too good to be ignored.

FAMOUS PLAY IS BASIS . . .

● **RICH MAN, POOR GIRL**; Metro production and release; producer, Edward Chodorov; director, Reinhold Schunzel; screen play by Joseph A. Fields and Jerome Chodorov; based on play, "White Collars," by Edith Ellis; adapted from story by Edgar Franklin; musical score, Dr. William Axt; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associate art directors, Gabriel Scognamiglio and Edwin B. Willis; wardrobe by Dolly Tree; photography, Ray June; film editor, Frank E. Hull. Cast: Robert Young, Lew Ayres, Ruth Hussey, Lana Turner, Rita Johnson, Don Castle, Guy Kibbee, Sarah Padden, Gordon Jones, Virginia Grey, Marie Blake.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

Y *EAR*S and years ago, long before the silver screen had emitted a peep, a play called *White Collars* distinguished itself by running for some three or four years at the little Egan's Theatre here in our city of the angles—excuse, of the angels. At the time of viewing it I was too absorbed in plastering with lollipop viscosity the gentleman's ear before me, to note what dramaturgical merits the opus possessed but it seems likely that more than a low house rental and an under-paid cast were responsible for its lengthy engagement. Evidently the play had something to say about middle class life which audiences found valid, significant, and amusing; and it is understandable why the MGM people and Producer Edward Chodorov deemed the play suitable material upon which to base a new picture.

Cast Is Capable . . .

T *HE* chief asset of the picture is the able performances on the part of the entire cast. The most meritorious contribution to the film of European Director Reinhold Schunzel, making his American debut with this piece, is his sure-handed handling of the players, each of whom gives a boldly drawn and animate interpretation of his part. Filming of the story, though, is done according to the familiar philosophy that the camera is merely something you set up and take pictures with. *Rich Man, Poor Girl* personifies to the nth degree the photographed stage play type of motion picture. The story is told principally with shots of first one character and then the other talking or doing some trivial bit of business.

Interesting Group of Types . . .

T *HE* cast is a strong one and the types created are in themselves an interesting group of Americans. Outstanding is Lew Ayres, as the amusing Cousin Henry. Apparently his stock as an actor has gone up considerably, for the audience held him in high favor throughout the entire picture. His directorial experience seems to have heightened his skill as an actor, and he characterizes effectively. Robert Young, as the rich young man, gives his usual smooth and engagingly flippant performance, making the most of a scene in which he endeavors to spend the night on a hard and noisy sofa at the apartment of the family,

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and is beset by a loud radio, a stray fly. A newcomer is Ruth Hussey, who did excellent playing in the stage show of *Dead End* when it played these parts, and now reveals herself as a capable screen actress. Some vivid moments are also registered by Lana Turner, one of her dramatic scenes drawing applause from the preview audience. Sarah Padden does her customarily fine trouping as the mother, and Don Castle, Rita Johnson, Guy Kibbee, and Gordon Jones are among the others seen to advantage. All of Ray June's photographic shots are of good texture, though the treatment of the story did not afford much opportunity for cinematographic ingenuity. What there was of Dr. William Axt's musical background sounded very suitable and pleasant; would there had been more of it. The sets have been done with careful attention to detail by Cedric Gibbons and his associates, and Dolly Tree's costuming of the ladies struck me as being swank.

EVOKED ROARS AND SCREAMS . . .

● **SAFETY IN NUMBERS**; 20th-Fox picture and release; director, Malcolm St. Clair; associate producer, John Stone; screen play by Joseph Hoffman, Karen De Wolf and Robert Chapin; original story by Dorothy Manney and Zena George; based on characters created by Katharine Kavanaugh; photography, Charles Clarke; art directors, Bernard Herzbrun and Boris Leven; film editor, Harry Reynolds; costumes, Helen A. Myron; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Jed Prouty, Shirley Deane, Spring Byington, Russell Gleason, Ken Howell, George Ernest, June Carlson, Florence Roberts, Billy Mahan, Marvin Stephens, Iva Stewart, Helen Freeman, Henry Kolker, Paul McVey.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

ONE would not have believed that the earlier Jones Family pictures could be topped in entertainment value, but this one does it. The preview audience, a representative neighborhood assemblage, surrendered itself wholly to its spell, mused, tittered, roared, and screamed. Encompassing more physical action than have most of the other pictures of the series, *Safety In Numbers* is a film of extraordinary vitality, one engrossing event tumbling on another. The climax presents a conventional automobile chase, but what a chase it turns out to be! For once, bellowing motors and screeching tires have been used to good effect, believe it or not. The volume and velocity of the sound are overwhelming and exciting in somewhat the same way as they were in *Hurricane*. Perhaps the director and sound engineers, in this particular case, have actually achieved "imaginative sound," which the *Spectator* has been championing for long. Perhaps our familiarity with, and interest in, the characters largely accounts for our concern over the chase. Explain it as you will, the audience was electrified. A young man next to me kept bouncing about and shouting, "Hoo! Hoo!" Do not infer, however, that I am suggesting other directors should attempt to duplicate the effect.

Direction Is Excellent . . .

MALCOLM ST. CLAIR has not neglected the human touches in his handling of the script, though. The first stirrings of puppy love, the mellow wisdom

of the mother, the virtues and follies of all the characters he has pictured in a deft way. St. Clair has done an A-1 job of directing, realizing all the possibilities the script afforded, and probably doing a little more than that. The central plot has been used once or twice before—crooks persuade townspeople that an old swamp is filled with valuable mineral water and inveigle the suckers into investing their savings in a health resort—but the situation is meaty enough to stand repetition, and here it is given fresh treatment and embellished with sub-plots. The lovable Spring Byington, Jed Prouty, and their satellites in the story are all in top thespian form, and the present picture is further enhanced by first-rate performances from Iva Stewart, Helen Freeman, and Henry Kolker. Charles Clarke's photography and the other production values are of the usual high standard.

REPLETE WITH COWBOY MUSIC . . .

● **THE MAN FROM MUSIC MOUNTAIN**; Republic; associate producer, Charles E. Ford; director, Joe Kane; screen play, Betty Burbridge and Luci Ward; original story, Bernard McConville; photographer, Jack Marta; film editor, Lester Orleback. Cast: Gene Autry, Smiley Burnette, Carol Hughes, Sally Payne, Ivan Miller, Edward Cassidy, Lew Kelly, Howard Chase, Albert Terry, Frankie Marvin, Earl Dwire, Lloyd Ingraham, Lillian Drew, Al Taylor, Joe Yrigoyen, Polly Jenkins and Her Plowboys.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

DEVOTEES of cowboy music should find *Man From Music Mountain* a feast, for it abounds in the kind of homey songs that are sung by our brethren on the range. Gene Autry sings most of the ditties in his individual singing style, and is heard to especially good effect in the plaintive tunes, supported part of the time by a full-throated chorus of voices. Several humorous songs are put over in an amusing way by Comedian Smiley Burnette, assisted by various other players. The large number of songs, however, though they are worked into the story in a facile way, slow up the action somewhat. The yarn itself boasts an unusual situation, a deserted ghost town having been peopled with hopeful "modern pioneers" by crafty real estate sharks, under the pretense that the new electric power line from Boulder Dam is to pass through the town. A depleted gold mine in which the settlers were to have a share, turns out to have an undiscovered vein, and this good fortune, together with Autry's shrewdness and heroism, brings a happy solution to the disillusioned population. The story is told very much in the conventional manner; there are spectacular heroics aplenty, including Autry's fete of shooting a rope in two on horseback and at a considerable distance. This is not a superior Western, but those who are not too exacting will see a good deal of entertainment value in it.

Boulder Dam Shots Impress . . .

THE cast is generally efficient. Gene Autry's personality registers with the audience, though many of his scenes could have been played with greater variety and accentuation. Use of his own name for

the character he plays takes illusion from the story: Smiley Burnette makes a lively and infectious comic, and the comely Carol Hughes and Funster Sally Payne are well cast. Joe Kane in directing has gotten plenty of physical movement into the acted portions of the film. A unique musical performance is given by Polly Jenkins and Her Playboys, who jingle bells and play xylophones and express themselves in any number of musical modes. The picture is given a good technical production, and Jack Marta's photography is excellent. Some shots of Boulder Dam at the first of the film were really magnificent.

ONLY FAIR WITHERS OPUS . . .

● **ALWAYS IN TROUBLE**; 20th-Fox picture and release; stars Jane Withers; associate producer, John Stone; director, Joseph Santley; screen play by Karen De Wolf and Robert Chapin; based on an original story by Albert Treynor and Jeff Moffitt; photography, Lucien Andriot; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and David Hall; set decorations, Thomas Little; film editor, Nick De Maggio; costumes, Helen A. Myron; sound recording, Joseph E. Aiken and William H. Anderson; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Supporting cast: Jean Rogers, Arthur Treacher, Robert Kellard, Eddie Collins, Andrew Tombes, Nana Bryant, Joan Woodbury, Joseph Sawyer, Charles Lane, Pat Flaherty.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

ALTHOUGH *Always In Trouble* is not on a par with most of the earlier Jane Withers pictures, the large following of Withers fans will doubtless be sufficiently amused by it. The volatile young actress makes her presence felt, as usual, gingerly romping through many antics in her endeavor to regulate the lives of her elders. A shortcoming of the story as a vehicle, however, is that, though Jane affects the fates of the other characters aplenty, the situations center pretty much about these other characters and do not involve the star as much as they should. The story, moreover, is not a well integrated piece of fiction; there is excess matter at the first of the film which makes the yarn slow in getting under way, it tends to be talkative, and the plot runs thin toward the close, creating little suspense. Couched in a tone of farce throughout, the material furthermore does not afford Jane her usual scenes of pathos, which are important to the child's work, not only because they provide contrast, but also because she does them very well. Nor are the songs and impersonations which have brightened earlier films present in the current one.

Actress Impresses . . .

A HIGHLIGHT of the picture is the comedy performance of Nana Bryant, as the child's nouveau riche mother. A wide range of emotional fluctuations, from brittle causticity to mellow nostalgia, she portrays with an effectiveness and surity which reflect an excellent theatrical background. It is to be hoped that an actress of such equipment will be seen in more important roles in the future. A runner-up for performance honors is Comedian Eddie Collins, who makes the most of his role of the parasitic Uncle Ed. Most of the action centers about Robert Kellard, who is made out by Jane, against protestations,

to be a cruel kidnapper when the yacht in which he and the family are cruising is wrecked on a Florida island, this accusation being a stunt to frighten the family into submission and bring them down from their high horse. The chap finally agrees to cooperate, and behaves like a domineering caveman, until a real gang of kidnappers enters the scene and tries to make him their "front" in collecting ransom.

Simple Things Are Effective . . .

KELLARD makes the mistake of working too hard, pouncing on most of his points. He plays almost constantly in a loud and frenzied key, and greatly overdoes the stage juvenile convention of wiggling his head. I think he has a good screen personality, though he did not hold still long enough for one to find out definitely. On the screen it is always the simple things which are the most effective. Jean Rogers is competent in her part, and Joan Woodbury characterizes a gangster's moll with considerable dash. Arthur Treacher and Andrew Tombes do their customarily dependable work. Director Joseph Santley strives to inject life into a faltering fictional carcass, but his zeal has led him into heavy-handedness in numerous places. The most spontaneous and funniest portion is when the picture goes slapstick with a free-for-all fight, people banging each other on the heads with skillets and jabbing posteriors with forks. Sets and photography are standard.

IT WASN'T FUNNY . . .

● **BLOCK-HEADS**; Metro release of Hal Roach production; stars Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy; directed by John G. Blystone; associate producer, Hal Roach, Jr.; original story and screen play by Charles Rogers, Felix Adler, James Parrott, Harry Langdon and Arnold Belgard; photography, Art Lloyd; photographic effects, Roy Seawright; film editor, Bert Jordan; musical director, Marvin Hatley. Supporting cast: Patricia Ellis, Minna Gombell, Billy Gilbert, James Finlayson.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

BASED on the premises that five heads are better than one, Associate Producer Hal Roach, Jr., assigned Charles Rogers, Felix Adler, James Parrott, Harry Langdon and Arnold Belgard to fashion the latest Laurel and Hardy comedy, *Block-Heads*. Their combined efforts to infuse a little comedy in a lot of chatter and some bad, stale gags went a little sour. I am a Laurel and Hardy fan, and I have a lot of fun when I see one of their shorts, but it seems that Hal Roach should have learned that you cannot stretch a two-reel comedy into ten reels of feature without something thinning out somewhere.

There Is No Plot . . .

THERE is no plot, of course. Laurel and Hardy are two pals, as usual. Slapstick is spread on from the opening shots to the end. But slapstick cannot carry a picture by itself. There was one gag I thought in considerable bad taste. Laurel at a Soldier's Home gets himself twisted in a wheel chair, simulates a one-legged man in appearance. That is the basis for a sequence fully a reel long. Personally,

I did not think it was funny. The talents of Patricia Ellis and Billy Gilbert are wasted in stock characterizations. Miss Ellis is an engaging young lady who knows what to do before a camera, but she cannot do it if it is not there to do. Stock characterizations are one of the minor curses of the industry. Gene Lockhart, a screen comic, showed what might be done in *Algiers*. Billy Gilbert, he of the sneeze, is another comedian who was not given the proper chance.

CINEMATIC SOLILOQUY

Induced by

RANDOM NOTES from the LITTLE SCRATCH PAD

of

MABEL KEEFER

HOWARD BARNES, of the *New York Herald Tribune*, in his review of *Blockade*, says many things with which I agree. There is, without doubt, much compromise and hedging, and the story of the soldier hero and the beautiful spy is trite—perhaps stupid, as Mr. Barnes says, although I do not agree that Madeleine Carroll is unconvincing as a spy. I found her much easier to take than the slippery, slithering type usually portrayed, and it does not seem improbable that a girl growing up under unfavorable conditions might yet have a basic character that would cause her to learn as she lived. But back of all the imperfections of the picture, William Dieterle has put a certain something that leaves a lasting impression. One remembers *Blockade* as doing more than just showing the devastation wrought on a civilian population. The opening sequences of the film hold up a positive picture of the joy and beauty of pastoral peacefulness. By contrast, it shows that war is against the Divine plan. There is the gripping portrayal by Henry Fonda, of the peasant's love for his land; of his deep realization of God-given blessings and his fervent wish to hold on to them. And the few seconds of exquisite sound when we hear the bells of the *Angelus*. Then, the end, with the peasant-soldier hero looking directly at the camera and asking: "Where is the conscience of the world!" These are the things that stay with some of us—the things that make the picture worth while to us. And so, while it may be true, as Mr. Barnes says, that "you will develop a far more definite and intelligent reaction to present-day warfare by watching a few selected newsreels than by witnessing *Blockade*," there still remains that certain something which the newsreels cannot give, and which Mr. Wanger, Mr. Dieterle and all those connected with the making of *Blockade* have given us.

* * *

AS I read the reviews of what one reviewer calls "this fat and gushy biography of Gabriele D'Annunzio," I feel rather ill. Wonder what would happen to me if I were to read the book. "... the poet used a pint of 'Eau de Coty' a day." Whew! Open the window—quickly please! "Nor did he expect

much intelligence in women either." How fortunate. Yet they say that all women fell for him—that he mowed 'em down—or am I thinking of Charlie McCarthy? Anyway, I'd rather think of Charlie McCarthy.

* * *

DOROTHY DUCAS, in the *New York Herald Tribune*, says that Walt Disney is fond of lowbrow music. Be that as it may, the musical backgrounds—or rather, accompaniments—of the Disney cartoons are, most emphatically, not lowbrow. The music is infectious—gay, lilting; plaintive, poignant; comic, but always tuneful. It is, in short, the kind of music that is good medicine for all of us. Any music that arouses wholesome emotions is good music, whether it be a classic, a simple air or a jig. Maybe I have said that before.

* * *

NOTICED the title of a book just published—"A Roof Against the Rain." What I particularly like is rain against the roof, if it be a gentle summer rain and the roof be tin. The sound is one of the nicest lullabies I know.

* * *

DR. USSHER is right when, in his review of the music in *Blockade*, he infers that a simple shepherd would not be apt to play a tune "which sounds like an afterthought inspired by the opening flute solo in Debussy's *Afternoon of a Faun*." But, it is such an exquisite thing! Mightn't we assume that that was the way it sounded to the shepherd when he played his pipe? That the music was in his soul? With Leo Carrillo playing the part of the shepherd, it is very easy to imagine it.

* * *

SAY IT ISN'T SO! . . . I have just been reading an article by Bruce Pinter, on the question of censorship. He says: "One studio suffered quite a shock not so long ago when one of its scripts was returned for revision. In the script one of the characters complained of a headache, and another asked him why he did not take some bicarbonate of soda. The censor asked that aspirin be substituted for the soda. 'We do not like to mention laxatives on the screen,' he explained." And that is the type of mind that decides what our screen fare shall be. Strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. And they do swallow camels.

* * *

PAGING Editor Beaton—One of my office associates has this to say about *Three Blind Mice*: "It was such a good picture to see after a hot, tiring day. You could relax and not have to think—just have a thoroughly good time with a bunch of nice people." The young lady must have been reading *Spectator* editorials.

* * *

MARC CONNELLY, writing in the *New York Herald Tribune*, quotes Robert Benchley on the subject of swing music. "I have nothing against swing itself," says Mr. Benchley, "any more than I have something against opium or tea-shoppe salads in themselves. It's what they lead to that's danger-

ous. . . . With every orchestra leader in America constantly announcing, 'I'll now play my own swing version of Rubenstein's "Melody in F" entitled "Bite the Bishop",' the children are going to accept the phrase 'Rubenstein's Melody in F' as a cryptic gag the old wiz on the podium is throwing to the alligators. They won't believe there was any 'Melody in F.' It's bad enough to hear an insolent vandal without a crumb of imagination touch up a Chopin waltz to his own higher standards, but it's worse to observe an entire generation of potential music appreciators being denied the knowledge that simple and lovely music exists.' And never man spake truer words, Mr. Benchley!

* * *

AFTER all, little things do count. I got off to a good start with *White Banners* because of two small happenings in the early sequences of the film. One was Hannah's ability to prepare a good dinner from left overs—I like doing that sort of thing myself, so the appeal was strong—and the other was the catchy musical theme that accompanied the appearance of the milkman. I almost said the musical milkman theme, which would not have been so far off because of his whistle. The jingle of the sleigh bells and the milkman walking to the rhythm of his whistling; even the horse trotting in rhythm—all these things produced a beneficial rhythmic reaction in the audience. And that is a subject which producers and exhibitors would do well to study.

THIS HOLLYWOOD

By Bert Harlen

CLASS WITH A CAPITAL "A" . . .

PICTURE executives who requested the Hollywood Turf Club could have picked up an idea or two on showmanship. Like Eadie who was a lady, the whole enterprise exuded "class with a capital A." Nothing was haphazard; everything in view reflected a design to impress. Even the horses which pulled out the starting post were graced with bright red plumes. A nattily dressed band whipped up pungent syncopation, a gayly clad goose girl walked about a little lake, keeping the geese in movement on the water. There was not a signboard in sight. Even sheds in the distance were concealed by the foliage of newly-inserted trees. Everywhere was opulence; everything was done to a tee. People felt gala. They were going somewhere and seeing something. They even enjoyed paying fifty cents up for drinks.

Where Are Shows of Yesteryear? . . .

PICTURE-GOERS of this country once went to the better type of motion picture theatre with a degree of the same festivity and awe. Such houses really lived up to a publicized appellation "movie palace." Managers prided themselves on the "class"

with which they conducted their theatres. One was met at the door by immaculately groomed, carefully disciplined Sir Galahads and shown through halls gleaming with crystal and general extravagance and bathed in the most subtle and iridescent lighting effects. Even the neighborhood houses prided themselves on their service and appointments. The larger houses were frequently show-places of their localities. Remember when the Paramount Theatre in Los Angeles opened with an appended art gallery and a forty-piece symphony orchestra rising out of the floor? The theatre utilized entrances on three streets in those days. Now it has one entrance.

Palaces Now Circuses . . .

THEATRES of today need no description. Or it might be said they defy it. Patrons are all too familiar with the display of garish signs and beaver-board embellishments which almost completely conceal the original architecture and which, from a distance of half a block, fairly strike one in the face. Inside there is similar disfigurement, sometimes abetted by gas ranges or a Chevrolet. What brought about the degeneration in the "class" philosophy of theatre management presents a complex problem. Likely there were multiple interrelated causes. Undoubtedly the chief cause was the falling off in box-office receipts once the talking picture had lost its novelty. With motion picture producers unaware at the time that any fundamental change in entertainment values had been engendered by the advent of sound, it was unlikely that they would believe their produce responsible for the falling receipts in their theatre chains. Exploitation was their panacea, and they resorted to it in broader and broader forms until the present circus-like level was reached. With the debasement of taste in this direction, laxness toward appointments and service was inevitable. Independent exhibitors more or less followed the example of the larger theatres.

Why Not a Return to Taste? . . .

IT CANNOT be said, of course, that the side-show tactics were unwise in all cases, from the viewpoint of immediate monetary returns, for audiences have been subjected to so many sterile and raucous evenings since the coming of sound, that sometimes Barnum-like exploitation must have been necessary to lure them back. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the earlier method of theatre management was in itself greatly responsible for the success of motion pictures in the prosperous days of yore. And now that talking pictures have quieted down a bit, generally speaking, and are steadily employing more background music and affording greater visual appeal, in fact, are markedly improved in texture and entertainment value, it is interesting to speculate upon what the effects would be of a prevalent return to the "class" philosophy. It will be noted that several of the nation's theatres having outstanding box-office returns are conducted very much according to the old standards; witness the Radio City Music Hall and the Carthay Circle.

William A. Seiter

Director

“ROOM SERVICE”

Starring

The Marx Brothers

An R-K-O Picture

Hollywood **SPECTATOR**

10 CENTS

A Weekly

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—September 3, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 16

Editor Has Heart-to-Heart Talk
With His Readers

Strong Man Behind Government's
Anti-Trust Gun

Ignorant Domination of Directors
Hurts the Box-Office

Frank Capra Gives the Screen Its
Finest Talkie

YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU ★ I AM THE LAW ★ CAREFREE
SPAWN OF THE NORTH ★ FRESHMAN YEAR ★ MY LUCKY STAR
WHILE NEW YORK SLEEPS ★ BREAKING THE ICE ★ ROAD TO RENO
THREE LOVES HAS NANCY ★ BILLY THE KID RETURNS

HOLLYWOOD'S OLDEST FILM PUBLICATION; ONLY
ONE DEVOTED SOLELY TO SCREEN CRITICISM



From the EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

SOME SPECTATOR SHOP-TALK . . .

WHEN Paramount's *Spawn of the North* was in the making, a *Spectator* salesman sold advertising space to several of those engaged in the production of the picture, the understanding being that the advertising was to appear simultaneously with the showing of the picture in Los Angeles—IF (a big if) the *Spectator's* review of the picture when previewed, was a favorable one. I do not mean to insinuate that the advertising was promised as a bribe to the *Spectator* to praise the production. The "if" was merely common business sense, as it would be unreasonable to expect people to advertise their connection with a picture in a paper which said it lacked merit. That *Spawn of the North* lacks merit is claimed in my review (page 9). That it lacks merit was registered by the large preview audience which saw it, and since the preview a common topic of conversation in studio circles has been Paramount's hard luck in not having a winner in this ambitious production.

Two Kinds of Rewards . . .

TWO other papers were promised advertising contingent upon the nature of their reviews of the picture—*Daily Variety* and *Hollywood Reporter*. Both papers go into raptures in rating it as superlative entertainment. The reward for their reviews will be the advertising they will contain when the picture is released. The *Spectator* will have even greater reward for its review, even though it will be one of which ordinarily it would not be conscious—the contentment it derives from merely following its usual course of telling just what it thinks about the pictures it sees. It is a course, of course, which pays bigger dividends in contentment than in money, and is born of laziness perhaps more than of principles, because it takes too much mental effort to say good things about bad pictures—at least, I think it must, but never have found out by trying it. The pictures I see write their own reviews; I set down only what the screen tells me, and that saves me all the bother of thinking up things it does not tell me.

It Can Happen Here . . .

THERE is nothing unusual in the *Spawn* incident. It happens frequently. Recently one of our advertising salesmen got a good start on some picture—I forget what its name was—by signing up \$305 in advertising, and had a lot more in sight, but along came my review classifying the picture as punk, and that put an end to that. I take it lightly as long as I can avoid Howard Hill, the *Spectator's* business

manager, who takes it heavily. It seems it takes money to pay printer's bills, salaries, rent, a car to punt me from one preview to another; and I think Howard once remarked bitingly that the stuff Mrs. *Spectator* and I eat has to be paid for by someone. But I will say this for him—he once said he would knock my block off if he caught me saying anything about a picture I did not believe. "We've got the best advertising medium in Hollywood," he argued, "the only paper which goes into the homes—not to the secretaries—of all the people directors, writers and players want to reach, and you should impress that fact on our readers. And you should sell some advertising yourself." To get rid of him I called up Bill Seiter and sold him a page which appeared in the last *Spectator*, and then I called up John Stahl and sold him the page which appears in this issue, and then I told Howard to go home.

Bi-Weekly for a Spell . . .

NOW the business manager comes to the front again and insists that I sell some more pages, half-pages, quarter-pages or what have you? He says the customers won't buy it from anyone else, and I tell him that if I spend my time hopping like a hungry flea from one prospect to another, I will have no energy left to put into the stuff I write; and he tells me then to write about needing advertising and ask the customers to give it to the *Spectator* representatives who ask for it. So, will the customers please consider themselves told? . . . And while I am talking shop because I am browbeaten into thinking about it, I might as well tell you that I am not going to put the *Spectator* back on its every-week schedule for a while. I must have time to fill orders for articles for Eastern magazines. They pay well, and a fellow, after all, must make a living somehow. Of course, if a lot of you bought *Spectator* advertising space, I could speedily go back to the every-week schedule and tell Max Aley, my New York agent, that there was nothing doing at this end of the line.

* * *

ALL THE WAY FROM INDIA . . .

MAGAZINE *Time* publishes a letter from India in which the writer says he could not believe a motion picture he saw was made in America because it showed detectives removing their hats when a woman entered the room they were occupying. He and his friends "thought it must be English, but were assured by an American present that gentlemen in America do remove their hats." That wandering Ameri-

can should come to Hollywood and go into conference with those picture people who are not yet aware how gentlemen behave in the presence of women. Scores of times I have protested against the wearing of hats where it should not be done, and particularly by officers of the law, but lowbrow conceptions are tough things to tackle.

* * *

GET READY FOR THE CHANGE . . .

NOT being much of a gadabout, I do not come in contact with many screen people, but those contacts I have had since the government started its anti-trust suit, have given me the impression that members of the film colony have not grasped the full significance to them of the changed production conditions which will be ushered in following a government victory. First, let us consider the probability of victory. Anyone reading the complete text of the government's bill of complaint, and who knows by familiarity with the industry's trade practices that all it charges can be proven by literally thousands of witnesses, will see that the defendant companies and persons must realize the futility of fighting the case. Those who may deem themselves unqualified to pass judgment on the merits of the bill of complaint itself, will gain some confidence in the strength of the government's case when they familiarize themselves with the career of the man in charge of it.

A Daniel Comes to Judgment . . .

TWO years ago, Yale University press published a book, *The Symbols of Government*, written by Thurman W. Arnold, a Yale professor of law. One reviewer termed the book, "one of the most realistic, devastating and constructively critical books on government and law to appear in our generation." Scores of reviews were equally enthusiastic in its praise. In October of last year appeared another book from the same author, *The Folklore of Capitalism*. In April of this year it had its seventh printing; probably has had some since. It is rated as the greatest contribution to political thinking since Marx, the most penetrating political study of the present century. One authority says of it, "Nothing more important, in the field of government and its relation to the everyday life of man, has been written for many a long year." The professor of law, who so profoundly has impressed the English-reading world, is now the ranking Assistant Attorney General of the United States, and it was he who prepared the case against the major film companies and their executive personnel; it is he who will see it through.

Man Behind the Gun . . .

ONE who reads the bill of complaint cannot escape being impressed with the convincing manner in which it develops the screen's "relation to the everyday life of man," the accusing finger which points from every paragraph in it, the air of impenetrable

authenticity which pervades it. It is the accuracy of the man behind it which puts menace in a gun. The Department of Justice has placed a sure hand on the trigger of its anti-trust gun. . . . But, in any case, even if there were any doubt about the outcome of the government's action, it would be wise for film people to prepare for what would follow a government victory. For one thing, there would be no more B pictures. In an open market in which every picture is sold on its merits as entertainment and not on the cost of its production, all pictures will have equal chance. The warmly human appeal of a *Love Comes to Andy Hardy* would bring a bigger price than the cold glitter of a *Marie Antoinette*. Picture production would become a free-for-all contest in which the greatest rewards would go to those who made the pictures of highest entertainment quality.

* * *

ALL OF THEM MIGHT TRY IT . . .

THE publicity department out at Universal Studio informs the press that it is "secretly enthusiastic" over the possibilities of a new player. If all the studios would keep most of their enthusiasms secret, the quality of the press matter they send out suddenly would describe an upward curve.

* * *

DIRECTOR UP AGAINST IT . . .

ONE of the complaints included by the Directors' Guild in its communication to producers setting forth the harm done pictures by incompetent associate producers, is that in many instances directors not only are not consulted when their scripts are being prepared, but do not get the scripts until the starting time of shooting. Some months ago I criticized a director for his handling of a certain dialogue scene which showed two characters conversing outside an open window. They made no effort to lower their voices, even though the next scene showed the interior of the room and the open window, but the characters in the room did not register that they heard what was said outside. I termed it stupid direction. After the *Spectator* appeared, the director asked me to lunch with him, and over a Brown Derby table he told me some of the difficulties he had experienced in making the picture. Over him had been one of the inexperienced young persons who belong in the lower bracket of associate producer intelligence, one who sought to conceal his ignorance by an aggressively boorish attitude which included contemptuous treatment of the director.

He Needed the Picture . . .

NOT having made a picture for some time, this one was needed by the director, not only as a bread and butter provider but also as something leading to more work. He asked if he could talk over the story with the writers; was told he would get the script when it was necessary, and that would be time

enough for him to know what the story was about. When the shooting date arrived, he was told there were some script revisions, and was handed some scenes he could start with, among them the one by the window. The associate was on the set. "Should the window be open?" the director asked. "Shoot the scene," the associate replied, curtly. The director shot it. He had no idea of its meaning, what preceded it or came after it; all he had were a piece of paper with some dialogue on it and a supervisor who treated him like dirt. He admitted my criticism was justified by what I saw, but told me my review of the picture was hurting him, had been quoted to him by one of the big producers who had been considering him for an important picture. I went directly from the Brown Derby to the producer's office, and now the director is shooting the important picture, and, according to the producer, is making a good job of it. He was present at the story conferences.

Enter Mark Hellinger . . .

A REVIEWER must be governed by what he sees on the screen. He has no way of knowing what goes on behind the scenes. The Directors' Guild is doing its members a service, and is taking a step toward the general improvement of the standard of screen entertainment, when it protests against supervision of production being entrusted to people wholly incapable of handling it. In the instance I cite above—and I am acquainted with many more on a par with it—the career of the director could have been ruined by the studio's folly in placing him under the domination of a man who was more interested in showing his power than in wielding it as wisely as his limited wisdom would permit. There are some capable supervisors, but the others are a menace to the careers of creative artists who have to work under them. Take Mark Hellinger. Having made his name well known by the clever newspaper work he has done and the lively sense of humor he displays, he is given a writing job at Warners even though none of his writings even hinted at his possession of knowledge of the fundamentals of screen art. Perhaps he shares the conviction of the big producer who once told me that the fundamentals changed so often he had given up attempts to keep track of them.

And Mark Is Promoted . . .

AFTER Mark had been on the Warner payroll for six or seven months, he was elevated to the rank of producer, thus acquiring authority to dictate to writers and producers who have been in pictures for more years than he has months to his credit. And no doubt his salary is one of those whopping ones which an executive in the steel industry would feel himself fortunate in being entitled to after a quarter-century's service to his employers. As a producer, Mark will dictate the expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars for each picture he makes, a big job for even a man who has spent his lifetime in pictures. But Mark is a versatile fellow. While he is turning out screen creations with his left hand, he will go ahead writing his syndicated newspaper page with his other

hand. Possibly, quite by accident, his page now and then will contain friendly references to his film employers, and that will be something. Careers of directors, writers and actors will be at the mercy of Hellinger's lack of knowledge of screen requirements. The other two guilds should join that of the directors in its efforts to remove such a menace to the safety of all creative workers.

* * *

LAUGHING WITH AND AT . . .

BOY MEETS GIRL is making the nation laugh. Pat O'Brien and Jimmy Cagney are to appear in a follow-up picture in which they will appear as the same team of nutty screen writers, and that picture, too, will make the nation laugh. The fly in the ointment is that the nation will laugh *at* the motion picture industry and not *with* it. That kind of laughter is not healthy for the industry in the long run. Lots of funny things could be written about Hollywood without ridiculing it. We do not respect a man less because he is funny, but we do lose our respect for him, even while laughing at him, when he goes completely crazy.

* * *

NOW LET US CAST "SCARLETT" . . .

WITH the laudable desire to revive interest in a national game which a few months ago was highly popular and freely indulged in—the game of casting *Gone With the Wind*—I would like to go into conference with you on the selection of the girl to play the leading role, that of Scarlett. First, we are confronted with the fact that the story has been read too widely to make it safe to take liberties with it, that Scarlett is so well known, so completely of the South, that no one but a Southern girl can play the part and get away with it. I never yet have encountered a Northern player who could play convincingly a Southern character. When a Northerner wants to impress his audience with his authenticity as a Southerner, he thinks his "You all" will turn the trick. The only time you hear "You all" in the South is when a Southerner is imitating a Northerner imitating a Southerner. The Southern expression is "Y'all," one word. But that is a matter of writing. Even if the dialogue is written with full regard for Southern idioms, *Gone With the Wind* will never be accepted by the South as authentically Southern unless the lines are spoken with the true Southern inflection which is almost impossible for an outlander to acquire and quite impossible for him to imitate.

Of the South. Southern . . .

THERE is a Southern girl in pictures, one whose progress I have watched for a half-dozen years, a beautiful girl who has not yet come into her own but who someday will with a splash that will disturb the cinematic pool. I refer to Gail Patrick. We met at a luncheon when she had been in Hollywood only a few weeks and was playing a small part in a Paramount picture. She told me she lacked screen ambitions, that she was going to remain in Hollywood only six months, then return to Alabama, study law,

someday become governor of her state. Six years to a day after arriving here she began work in a Paramount picture now shooting. At first she had difficulty in acquiring a Northern tongue, in forgetting purely Southern idioms, in learning to say "He took me to a party," instead of "He carried me to a party," as the true Southerner would say it. It is a treat to hear her now when her low, musical voice becomes the plaything of a tongue which brings Alabama to Hollywood. Gail has played several meanie parts, therefore could develop Scarlett's mean side; she has a commanding presence as well as beauty, her graciousness suggests good breeding, she has acting ability to meet all the requirements of the role—and she is of the South, Southern.

* * *

PICTURES AND THEIR PEOPLE . . .

ANOTHER thing the MAYBE boys might do to popularize picture-going: In some instances give handsome prizes to patrons who come nearest to explaining the relationship of stories and titles of the pictures. . . . Dorothy Lamour comes out of her tropical languor and in *Spawn of the North* gives a performance full of pep, one which does not compete for attention with the graceful lines of her figure. . . . I hope Bob Burns has not given up his intention of promoting the Mills plan for establishing a reasonably priced hotel here for actors who have not much money to spend for accommodations. It is a non-profit proposition he hoped to put over with picture money. . . . I like the way screen personalities are presented on the Bing Crosby radio programs; gives them a chance to play themselves. . . . John Howard, clever young actor who has played Bulldog Drummond in five pictures, has an interesting hobby; collects ducks, fashioned in metal, china, etc.; has about four hundred. . . . I shall remember for a long time the fine performance Joseph Calleia contributes to *Algiers*. . . . Glad to see that Tenen Holtz and Gustav von Seyffertitz, two outstanding actors who did fine work in silent pictures, are members of the cast of a talkie now in production. . . . Song hits of *Carefree*, the new Astaire-Rogers picture, have been popularized by radio broadcasts and displayed in song shops; the story has been told in pictures in *Life*; not much left for audiences to discover for themselves. . . . Now that producers have discovered that audiences are composed of human beings, something of which they were ignorant until the Jones, Hardy and other family pictures enlightened them, I hope one of them will have sense enough to make a box-office asset of Victor Moore's appealing personality and acting ability. . . . Jackie Searl, who so effectually can be the meanest, most irritating young boy on the screen, in real life is a little gentleman with a pleasing personality that makes him popular, a well brought-up boy who laughs at his own villainy after each take of one of his mean scenes. . . . Charlie Murray got a big hand when he appeared in a bit in a previewed picture. Why not Charlie, George Sidney and that grand trouper, Mary Gordon, together in a picture? . . .

Something else being overlooked is the comedy talents of Skeets Gallagher. . . . Someone rates Margaret Sullavan among the three greatest actresses in America; I agree, but don't ask me to name the other two. There are the names of scores of great actresses on the *Spectator's* subscription list, and sometimes I really must give thought to business. . . . To my way of thinking, Donald Woods is one of the cleverest and most agreeable young leading men in pictures. . . . Strange that in all the years both of us have been poking around in Hollywood, I never met Charlie Ruggles until last week. Our conversation was exclusively about dogs. . . . When I first became interested in pictures I always confused Warner Oland and Noah Beery; I can recall their having played together in a serial, and I know they always were close friends. Noah is the logical choice to carry on Charlie Chan.

* * *

PERSONALITY VERSUS PUBLICITY . . .

AFTER *Four Daughters* is released generally we will be given an opportunity to see if John Garfield's arresting personality and great acting ability can make him a film box-office favorite in spite of the exploitation Warners will give him. I have no information about the studio's plans, but presume it will do what always is done under like circumstances. His success in his first film role will be attributed to the nature of the role and not to his mastery of his art; he will be presented in a succession of similar roles until the public is fed up on his frustrated young fatalist performance. As early as in his second screen appearance he will be off to a bad start by virtue of the folly that without doubt will be displayed in the publicity given him. I can see now the big type in newspaper advertisements and huge letters on billboards proclaiming him as a "sensational new discovery," until the public will expect from him a performance beyond the range of human possibility. It never seems to occur to film publicists that the most solid foundation upon which an actor's career can rest is the public's discovery of him as an outstanding artist. His exploitation should trail a lap behind the public's gradual recognition of his talents, thus permitting it to believe it made a discovery the studio had overlooked. The best press agent John Garfield can have is John Garfield.

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WHAT LONG RUN RECORDS SHOW . . .

FROM the *Spectator* of July 23: "Two pictures, as far apart in theme, production and appeal as two could be, are *Snow White* and *Marie Antoinette*. The latter follows the former into the Carthay Circle Theatre. Enthusiastic Metro exploiters have predicted in print that the run of *Marie* will exceed the eighteen-week run of the Disney feature. The exploiters are too enthusiastic. My guess is that *Marie* will not run half as long as *Snow White* ran. I give *Marie* eight weeks, four weeks on the merits of the picture and four weeks under forced draft provided by Metro publicity." *Marie's* Carthay Circle's run will be eight weeks, three days. The three days were

added in the hope that the Labor Day week-end would drag in some extra business. *Snow White* ran eighteen weeks at the Carthay. In the silent days, *What Price Glory?* ran twenty-three weeks, three days; *Seventh Heaven*, twenty-one weeks, six days at the same house. The average run of all the silents shown there was thirteen weeks. Before the depression shutdown of the house—during the period of pre-depression prosperity—the average of talkie runs was six weeks. At the Egyptian, Hollywood's first long-run house, *The Covered Wagon* ran thirty-three weeks, five days; *The Ten Commandments*, thirty weeks, four days; *Robin Hood*, twenty-four weeks, four days. The longest run at the Chinese was that of the silent *King of Kings*, twenty-three weeks, five days. Of the early sound pictures shown there, *Broadway Melody* ran eighteen weeks, two days; *Hell's Angels*, seventeen weeks, four days. *Marie Antoinette*, the most elaborate talkie ever produced, makes a poor showing compared with the runs of the silent pictures and the early talkies. Seven years ago the *Spectator* predicted that talkies would not maintain the audience silent pictures had attracted.

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WHY BE AFRAID OF MUSSOLINI? . . .

JEW S dominate the American film industry. Mussolini has followed the lead of Hitler in persecuting Jews. The papers report that Metro has submitted its *Idiot's Delight* script to the Italian premier to get his approval before shooting on the picture begins, the script already having been rewritten in an effort to please him. If I were a Jew and a producer, I would see Mussolini in hell before I would consult him about a picture I was about to make.

* * *

PLAYER AND HIS LINES . . .

TO GIVE his best performance a player must absorb his part until he becomes the person he plays. It follows, then, that he should express himself in words as he feels that person would express himself. Not long ago I was on a set while a well known actor was playing a scene. I forget what the line was he had to read; let us suppose it was, "Well, you see it was this way; the letter didn't arrive in time." "O.K.!" said the director; but the dialogue director made a protest; the words, "You see it was this way," were not in the script; and the writer of the script, who happened to be on the set, joined in the protest, expressing the opinion that actors should not write dialogue. The director patiently explained things to the actor, and the scene was shot again. This time the actor said, "Well, the letter didn't arrive in time." That the line was flat even I could see. "It isn't the way I would say it, or feel it," the actor complained to the director. But the script was adhered to for two more takes; then the director exclaimed, "Enough! Print the first take." The actor instinctively had expressed the thought as the character he was playing would express it; the scenarist

wrote it as he would express it on paper for a reader to grasp its significance. There is a lot of difference between the two. Theoretical perfection in screen dialogue would be to give the player the thought and allow him to put it in words; practical perfection would be to approach theoretical perfection as closely as would be safe. Particularly in the case of brief, inconsequential speeches, the wording should be left to the actor and he should leave them to his emotions.

* * *

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

THE dogs don't like it when we dine in the house. When we dine outside we chuck them bits of food. . . . If the war in Spain lasts much longer, I will have to ask someone what they are fighting about. . . . You should see the display of fruit Mrs. Spectator has imprisoned in glasses and jars which stand at attention in military array on pantry shelves, awaiting the passing of the fresh fruit season; may good digestion wait on winter, and appetite on both. . . . The wild birds relish broken-up graham crackers in the grain mixture you set out for them. . . . Gus Edwards has a quiet, contemplative, placid disposition which makes him good company. . . . Between seven and eight in the morning, when I start writing under the big locust tree, songs of birds have a musical restfulness which suggests a reposeful night; flowers sparkle gently as the sun makes diamonds of beads of moisture night left on petals as nectar for the rays of morning to sip, and through her outward air of laziness comes the feeling that nature has squared away for another energetic day of making the earth more fruitful—then it is that I think morning is the choicest time; but when day is done and I sit again under the locust tree, the smoke from my pipe too indolent to do more than hang suspended in the moon's rays, when the birds twitter sleepy good-nights to one another, when the Spaniel rests his head upon my knee for a caress before, with a contented sigh, he stretches on the ground at my feet, and Mrs. Spectator's Pekinese raises soft paws which plead for a place on her lap, when the distant rumblings of the world outside come faintly to us to make more restful the nearer silence—then I think that night is the choicest time. . . . Strange that out of six eggs we bought on the assumption that they were laid by muscovy matrons, three pair of different kinds of ducklings rewarded the perseverance of Sophie, our muscovy, who hatched them; but, true to all muscovy traditions, all six are quackless, for all that they look like three different breeds. . . . I dined the other night at the Hollywood Brown Derby on a cut of Columbia River Salmon more delicious and seemingly fresher than salmon I recently had at a swank restaurant in Portland, Oregon, a city past which the Columbia River runs. . . . I have coffee at breakfast and dinner, but must have my pot of tea at lunch; when it is brought to me in a dry bag hanging on a pot of hot water, I shudder, send it back and insist upon boiling water being poured on the tea in the pot.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

WE MEET A NOISY FAMILY . . .

● **YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU**; Columbia; producer-director, Frank Capra; screen play, Robert Riskin; based on play by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart; photographer, Joseph Walker; film editor, Gene Havlick; art director, Stephen Goossan; associate art director, Lionel Banks; Miss Arthur's gowns, Bernard Newman and Irene; musical score, Dimitri Tiomkin; musical director, Morris Stoloff; assistant director, Arthur Black; sound engineer, Ed Bernds. Cast: Jean Arthur, Lionel Barrymore, James Stewart, Edward Arnold, Mischa Auer, Ann Miller, Spring Byington, Samuel S. Hinds, Donald Meek, H. B. Warner, Halliwell Hobbes, Dub Taylor, Mary Forbes, Lillian Yarbo, Eddie Anderson, Clarence Wilson, Joseph Swickard, Ann Doran, Christian Rub, Bodil Rosing, Charles Lane, Harry Davenport.

HALF an hour ago I took leave of a group of people who were dining at the home of Martin Vanderhof. You probably have heard of Martin, the fellow who started up in the elevator to go to his office, decided on the way up that he was getting nothing from life except the money he earned, determined on the spot to chuck it all; stayed in the elevator until it got down, and hasn't done a lick of work since. That was thirty-five years ago, and he has stuck to his vow. He is the grandfather of Alice Sycamore, the girl who is to marry Tony Kirby, only son of the Kirby, Anthony P., the near-billionaire. Old Martin strikingly resembles Lionel Barrymore, and you might mistake Alice for Jean Arthur, Tony for Jimmie Stewart, Anthony P. for Edward Arnold. But when I left them at the dinner table, with their joyously noisy relatives and friends around them, I saw them as themselves and not as motion picture players. . . . I paused there to do some thinking. With the spell of *You Can't Take It With You* still upon me, with the conviction strong within me that it is the best talking picture I ever saw, I am afraid I am not in a mental or emotional state to judge it dispassionately. I have decided to sleep on it, to get calmed down, to wait until tomorrow morning to tell you about it. It scarcely seems possible that it is as good as I think now that it is.

Best Talkie Ever Made . . .

MORNING: Each of the picture's virtues stands out in even bolder relief than when I took it apart last night and examined each part by itself. As no flaws became discernible, I now am definitely satisfied that this new Capra offering is the best talkie I have seen, and since the dawn of talkies my business has been to see them. As I make it a rule to stay away from stage plays which are destined for presentation on the screen, I am not aware what liberties Bob Riskin took with the story as it was related in the theatre. It is not an important point. What I saw was a story, new to me, as it will be new to all but a small handful of those who see the picture; and I am inclined to credit praise for results obtained, to the accounts of those two film geniuses, Frank Capra and Robert Riskin. Already the books showed a big balance in their favor, and *You Can't Take It With You* adds enormously to

it, so much that they can spare a lot for the authors of the original play.

Sound, Healthy Philosophy . . .

WHAT impresses me most about the picture is that while in most of its outward aspects it is just an hilarious comedy of the frantically funny type, straight through both its gay and grave scenes runs a golden thread of sound and healthy philosophy which has a lesson in it for those who strive only for riches, and comfort in it for those to whom life pays dividends in a richer currency than can be deposited in banks. With keen appreciation of the true values of the story and his extraordinary ability to realize them on the screen, Frank Capra has presented to the world a great human document which laughs at itself and makes us laugh with it, a document punctuated with heart throbs as well as the serious thoughts which are coated with the sugar of fun. A typical scene is one in the bedroom of Jean Arthur, Lionel Barrymore's granddaughter. Jean and Lionel are engaged in gay conversation. Quietly Lionel remarks that he still can detect the perfume of his dead wife's presence in the room which for so many years he shared with her. He continues to speak quietly, and gives us a love scene with a memory, which for sheer beauty, tenderness, sweetness, is a brilliant gem among the rarest with which screen history has adorned itself. It was not great acting; it was great direction making two players feel greatly and compelling the audience to feel with them.

Weaves An Emotional Spell . . .

WITH admirable restraint Frank weaves the emotional threads in and out of the general pattern, so deftly and so smoothly that several times I became aware there was a lump in my throat but not aware of the reason for its presence. So unusual was this giving emotional response to something specific which had not registered with my intellect, after the preview I asked others about it and found that all had had the same experience, had been held too completely under the spell of the picture to give thought to the reason for it. It is upon this extraordinary power of the picture I base my opinion that *You Can't Take It With You* is the best talkie ever made. It belies its name, for you can take it with you for a long, long time before you are likely to find another to dim your memory of it. Frank Capra develops his values by the simplest methods. For years I have been clamoring for the reading of dialogue in natural conversational tones, claiming it to be the greatest asset a picture can have. If what I mean is not clear to you, see this picture and it will become clear. Another thing I complain of frequently is the unnatural flattening of a group to make all the people in it face the camera. Frank gives us such a scene, one in which he wants us to see all the faces while they are registering reaction to a letter being read. By the simple expedient of grouping his people around the end of a long dining-room table and placing his camera at the other end of the table, he brings every face to the screen in a naturally composed scene. The

trouble with the scenes of which I have complained is that they have the same grouping without the table to account for it.

No Acting Means Good Acting . . .

SO PERFECT a whole can be composed only of perfect parts. We never before had a picture in which there was less acting, which is another way of saying that we never before had a picture in which there was so much superb acting. An old *Spectator* contention is that the screen is not an acting art, that it is an art of feeling emotions and letting the camera convey them to the audience. When you see the Capra masterpiece you will see what I mean. It is an even acting pattern which Frank gives us. Jean Arthur is superb, but none of her many scenes is done with rarer skill than that displayed in his one scene by the veteran Harry Davenport, whose name I find at the end of the list of those who play the parts. Ideal casting opposite Jean is that ever ascending shooting star, Jimmie Stewart, who rapidly is nearing the main constellation. From the first time I saw him, every moment he is on the screen has been rich in entertainment values for me. Edward Arnold, without his annoying loud and long laughter, with a part moulded to his mind and body, rises to heights he never before attained. The gracious, always appealing Spring Byington, is delightful in her characterization of a playwright who cannot write plays; Mary Forbes, strikingly effective as an uncompromisingly snooty grande dame; H. B. Warner, doing magnificently the one heavily dramatic scene in the picture; Donald Meek, Mischa Auer, Sam Hinds, Ann Miller—but you can run down the list for yourself. The sets by Stephen Goosson and Lionel Banks are as much a part of the story as is the dialogue. Under Goosson, the Columbia art department has turned out some notable examples of screen architecture. The music in *You Can't Take It With You* I leave to Bruno Ussher (page 15).

EDDIE IS THE LAW . . .

● **I AM THE LAW**; Columbia picture and release; producer, Everett Riskin; director, Alexander Hall; original screen play by Jo Swerling; photography, Henry Freulich. Cast: Edward G. Robinson, Wendy Barrie, Barbara O'Neil, Otto Kruger, John Beal, Arthur Loft, Douglas Woods, Charles Halton, Emery Parnell, Gene Morgan, Robert Middlemass, Byron Foulger, Anthony Hughes, Walter Smalley, Scott Colton, Gaylord Pendleton, Marshall Grant, Nick Lukats.

EXPERT gang-busting in celluloid. Not so much a story as it is a series of scenes showing the various steps taken to suppress racketeering in an American city and give the racketeers all that was coming to them. But as the scenes are alive with drama and flit across the screen in rapid and logical progression, you may put *I Am the Law* on your list of pictures worth seeing. It is excellent entertainment, full of action, terse and purposeful dialogue and outstanding performances. Against a background of pictorial effectiveness designed by Columbia's Stephen Goosson and Lionel Banks, and photographed by Henry Freulich, stirring scenes build to a smashing triumph of

law and order. Jo Swerling's screen play sticks closely to its theme, adroitly piling up obstacles until it appears impossible for the force of the law to overcome them, thus sustaining suspense at a high level which holds the close attention of the audience. Swerling does not clutter up his script with romantic interludes. Edward G. Robinson is married to Barbara O'Neil when the picture opens, and no one else is in love with anyone else, although Otto Kruger does have an affair with Wendy Barrie.

Gets Under Way Promptly . . .

NO TIME is wasted in putting the audience squarely on the side of the law. A quick succession of scenes reveals racketeers in their most brutal mood. We see business places wrecked, trucks overturned, milk cans punctured; then we are shown the futile efforts of the law to cope with the situation; we get a glimpse of the people in high places who head the racketeers and give them protection, thus setting the stage for the entrance of the hero-crusader who is to put an end to it all. And a real hero Eddie Robinson proves to be. He plays a college professor of law whose only weapon in his war on crime is his highly trained legal brain which he pits against the financial and physical resources of firmly entrenched lawlessness. He gives us one of the best performances—perhaps the best—of his career. The gracious and comely Barbara O'Neil is well cast as Robinson's wife. She makes reasonable her husband's love for her, and proves her loyalty by fighting at his side until the war is over.

Beal, Barrie, Kruger, et al . . .

A YOUNG fellow who always gives a sterling performance is John Beal, who here is Robinson's chief of staff. His work always is characterized by earnestness and understanding which readily gain him the sympathy of an audience, and his appealing personality keeps the sympathy alive. Wendy Barrie impresses as a gangster's moll of distinguished bearing and with a taste for the finest of rainment. She murders a man, and that puts an end to her colorful career. Otto Kruger is in complete command of his role as the brains of the racketeering ring. No weakness is displayed by any member of the supporting cast. There are two bits played by people who impressed me with their sincerity and quiet effectiveness. Fay Helm appears briefly as the husband of Louis Jean Heydt, the victim of a gangster's bullet. I would like to see each of them in something bigger. Everett Riskin, the producer in charge of the picture,

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is to be credited with having turned out a piece of first class screen entertainment. Al Hall's direction is masterly throughout. A story so psychologically sound and physically energetic needed nice handling to keep its values from clashing, and nice handling is what Hall gives it. He is a director who is coming along rapidly.

BIG ONE THAT MISSES . . .

● **SPAWN OF THE NORTH**; Paramount release of Albert Lewin production; director, Henry Hathaway; screen play by Jules Furthman and Talbot Jennings; based on story by Barrett Willoughby; musical direction, Boris Morros; music by Dimitri Tiomkin; photography, Charles Lang; process photography, Farciot Edouart; special effects, Gordon Jennings; assistant director, Holly Morse; associate director, Richard Talmadge; art direction, Hans Dreier and Roland Anderson; film editor, Ellsworth Hoagland; music and lyrics, Burton Lane and Frank Loesser. Cast: George Raft, Henry Fonda, Dorothy Lamour, Akim Tamiroff, John Barrymore, Louise Platt, Lynne Overman, Fuzzy Knight, Vladimir Sokoloff, Duncan Renaldo, John Wray, Mickio Ito, Stanley Andrews, Richard Ung, Slicker.

MISSES. Producer Al Lewin and Director Henry Hathaway had at their command all the ingredients which go into the making of a picture with epic sweep, but in the nearly two hours it takes to show it on the screen, it succeeds only in being dull and tiresome, for all that it has a great background to give it physical strength and story elements which could have given it dramatic strength. There is too much straining to make George Raft both hero and villain. When the hero-villain formula is presented, it entertains us only in the degree in which our sympathies have been created for one or the other. Usually, of course, it is the hero for whom our interests are enlisted; we wish him well, and applaud his efforts to overcome the obstacles he meets in accomplishing whatever it is he sets out to do. *Spawn of the North* does not create in us wishes to see any definite end achieved—unless, after an hour and a half of it, we have a definite desire to see the end of the picture reached. We neither love the hero nor hate the villain enough to care greatly what happens to either.

Scenes Which Mean Little . . .

THE story is involved and reaches beyond the borders of the interest it could demand to bring in incidents which prove to have no direct bearing on it. Henry Fonda, an upright young man, remains steadfastly loyal to his friendship for a common fish thief, a story premise almost impossible to make entertaining. There are two romances which could have been dispensed with to the advantage of the picture. *Captains Courageous* did very well without even one romance. There is a fight at sea between the crews of two boats, but as in the dim light all the combatants look alike, we have no way of knowing who is winning, and even after it is over it is not made plain what the outcome was. There is a dual burial at sea which loses its impressiveness by virtue of our ignorance of the identity of the persons buried. Perhaps I would have known if my interest in the story had

been kept alive sufficiently to keep my mind on it. It is not up to an audience to keep alert on its own volition; it is the duty of the picture to keep the audience alert, to keep its mind from wandering.

Audience Was Apathetic . . .

THAT the preview audience was a friendly one was demonstrated when the credit titles were shown on the screen, each name being greeted with applause. Usually at previews there is generous applause at intervals to reward bits of good acting, impressive scenes or unusual spectacles. During running of this picture there was not one handclap not even when the audience was treated to what, if built to properly, would have been a thrill to provoke its enthusiasm as a fishing vessel was crushed beneath a crumbling iceberg and carried with it the two fish pirates whose plundering at traps had motivated the story, Raft and Akim Tamiroff. As our interest in performances cannot be greater than our interest in the story, the capable cast of *Spawn of the North* worked under difficulties. There are no great acting moments, no outstanding scenes to give actors a chance to stir their audience. With its running time reduced by the elimination of thirty or forty minutes of unnecessary scenes, the picture might get somewhere. As previewed, however, about all it has to boast about is that there are more fish in it than there were in *Captains Courageous*.

FRED AND GINGER BACK . . .

● **CAREFREE**; RKO; producer, Pandro S. Berman; director, Mark Sandrich; lyrics and music, Irving Berlin; screen play, Allan Scott and Ernest Pagano; story and adaptation, Dudley Nichols and Hagar Wilde; based on original idea by Marrian Ainslee and Guy Endore; musical director, Victor Baravalle; photographer, Robert de Grasse; art director, Van Nest Polglase; ensembles staged by Hermes Pan; Miss Rogers' gowns by Howard Grier; film editor, William Hamilton. Cast: Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Ralph Bellamy, Luella Gear, Jack Carson, Clarence Kolb, Franklin Pangborn, Walter Kingsford, Kay Sutton, Robert B. Mitchell and his St. Brendan's Boys.

BACK again as a team, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers will be given a cordial welcome wherever *Carefree* is shown. An Astaire-Rogers picture consists so largely of Astaire and Rogers that it does not matter greatly what else is in it. This time they appear in a gay, frothy story that under the able direction of Mark Sandrich trips along merrily, and is enriched by the best dancing the two stars have done together on the screen. The name of Dudley Nichols connected with a story is assurance that it has merit, but here we have him as one of a huge crowd of scriveners who are credited with having had a hand in the literary end of the picture, the others being Allan Scott, Ernest Pagano, Hager Wilde, Marian Ainslee and Guy Endore. I don't see how they do it; nor do I think it was fair to make Irving Berlin write the lyrics and music all by himself. He is such a little fellow. But his contribution to the picture is a big one. Another big contribution is that of Van Nest Polglase and Carrol Clark, whose settings are responsible for the visual beauty of the production.

And to the camera of Robert de Grasse goes credit for realizing all the beauty the settings made possible. One sequence in particular is photographed with rare artistry. It brings to life Ginger's dream that she is dancing with Fred, and around the moving figures is a fringe of dream lace as delicate as an imagined poem. Slow-motion camera work creates the impression that the dancers are floating through the frailty of a dream.

Personality and Popularity . . .

ONE of my cinematic convictions is that no player on the screen can give us anything more entertaining than his personality—that we cannot like anything he does more than we like him. When Fred Astaire first appeared on the screen the *Spectator* predicted a successful film career for him, basing the prediction on his personality more than upon his dancing, stating then that we liked his dancing because we liked him. In *Carefree* he makes us more than ever his friend. He is a capital and engaging light comedian, a player who brings to his tasks a keen intellect and intuitive appreciation of the story values of each of his scenes. His superlative dancing is an added attraction; her personality his chief asset; he is a good fellow, we consider ourselves good fellows, and it always is good pleasure when good fellows get together. Ginger Rogers is a girl I admire greatly. Although I have been hovering on the outer edge of pictures for all the years she has been in them, I have not made her acquaintance, consequently my impression of her is not influenced by personal contact. She is a hard working girl, ambitious, determined not to be typed as a dancer, determined to have recognition as an actress as an additional peg upon which to hang part of her career.

Ginger Is Coming Along . . .

WHAT makes me admire Ginger is her constant striving to improve her dancing even though she refuses to be typed as a dancer. Marked improvement is revealed in her *Carefree* dance numbers, more rhythmic grace in the movement of her body, a greater appreciation of the part the hands play in a dance. And she continues to add ease and understanding to her acting technique. Her *Carefree* performance is engaging, rather light when compared with other parts she has played, but strong enough to permit her to make entertaining the intervals between her dance numbers. Ralph Bellamy is good as the rather bewildered fiancé of Ginger whom he finally loses to Fred, but it is quite beyond me why the picture first shows him as almost too drunk to navigate. The presence of drunkenness on the screen is objectionable to some people; its absence is objectionable to none. There was no more reason for bringing in Ralph with a snootful than there would have been for bringing him in on the back of a rhinoceros. But they will do it. A member of the cast who creates a favorable impression is Luella Gear, a young woman who seems to be everyone's Aunt Cora. All the others in the cast do excellent work.

BOBBY BREEN'S BEST . . .

● **BREAKING THE ICE**; RKO-Radio release of Sol Lesser production; stars Bobby Breen; features Charlie Ruggles, Dolores Costello, Robert Barrat, Dorothy Peterson, John King, Billy Gilbert, Charlie Murray and Irene Dare; directed by Edward F. Cline; produced by Sol Lesser; screen play, Mary McCall, Jr., Manuel Seff, and Bernard Schubert; from original by Fritz Falkenstein and N. Brewster Morse; musical director, Victor Young; musical supervisor, Abe Meyer; music and lyrics by Franch Churchill and Paul Webster, Victor Young and Paul Webster; photographed by Jack MacKenzie; dance director, Dave Gould; art director, Lewis J. Rachmil; film editor, Arthur Hilton; assistant director, George Hippard. Supporting cast: Margaret Hamilton, Jonathan Hale, Spencer Charters, Maurice Cass.

SOL LESSER comes through with Bobby Breen's best picture to date, one notable for downright cleverness in story, direction and acting. The solid background of the picture is the stolid, colorless life of a Mennonite settlement in Pennsylvania, with its stilted speech and stern code of living, and to give it color we have the worldly brilliant comedy of Charlie Ruggles, who plays a cunning and none too scrupulous collector of antiques; and the glitter of some spectacular ice sequences featured by the marvelous skating of Irene Dare, a wee bit of joyous, five-year-old femininity that will wear down the resistance of the most unresponsive member of any audience. The picture gains much of its strength from the vividness of its contrasts and the consistency of its story and situations. Befitting its locale, the story is a simple one of the homely virtues of plain people, an interesting angle of it being its revelation to us of the existence of such a placid domestic pool in the midst of the swirl of the every-day life of the rest of us. Edward Cline, in his direction, has captured and sustained the mood of the story, its implacable sternness, its quiet unemotionalism. His Mennonite characters tread softly and speak softly, but, for all that, his scenes are vigorous with their undercurrent of decision and singleness of purpose.

Songs Have Story Value . . .

WE NEVER lose sight of the narrowness of the rural conceptions when the story glides into the breadth of city life, nor is there any lessening in the authority with which Cline develops the human values in the excellent screen play which the credits tell us is the joint work of Mary McCall, Jr., Manuel Seff and Bernard Schubert, whose starting point was the original story by Fritz Falkenstein and Brewster Morse. It is a smooth little story to come from such a largely populated huddle. In a Bobby Breen picture the star's songs, of course, figure prominently. One of the cleverest features of the production is the adroit manner in which each song number is made part of the story. While we are listening to Bobby's clear and rich soprano notes, we are not allowed to forget their story significance, thus they do not break the continuity of audience interest in the progress of events. The lyrics of Paul Webster, set to the music of Frank Churchill and Victor Young, form a combination responsible for a big

share of the satisfaction the picture will give. Lewis Rachmil designed and dressed some striking sets, the interior of the Mennonite home being particularly interesting by virtue of the air of authenticity which pervades it. Rachmil has done some able designing for other pictures. Also to the credit of *Breaking the Ice* is some excellent photography by Jack MacKenzie, and capable film editing, particularly in the skating sequences, by Arthur Hilton.

Cast Proves Capable . . .

BOBBY'S performance is his best to date. He gives a sincere and intelligent characterization of a Mennonite boy with a great love for his mother. Loving Dolores Costello should not be a hard task for either a boy or man. Young, beautiful, talented; possessed of a personality which captures your instant sympathy, her name today on a marquee could be a magnet to draw money to hungry box-offices if our reigning producers had one-tenth the picture ability their salaries laughingly suggest they have. For once we have a Charlie Ruggles who does not become maudlin through drink and gain laughs by silliness. Even so, I always have enjoyed his screen appearances, but no other quite as much as I did this one. Dorothy Peterson, clever actress with a warmly appealing personality; Robert Barrat, always dependable and who here gives a striking study of a Mennonite, sternly loyal to the age-old traditions of his sect; Jonathan Hale, quietly and effortlessly persuasive as usual, add strength to the picture, as do others in the cast who contribute well done bits. As shown in preview, *Breaking the Ice* needs cutting in a few spots. Near the end, there is too much talk before Ruggles and Bobby set forth in search of evidence to clear the boy's name. Another weakness is the spoiling of the effect of one of Bobby's best singing numbers by cuts to little Irene Dare doing some comedy stuff which any intelligent audience will resent. There are times when comedy cannot be funny. It is not good business to put in a picture something which will make ninety per cent of an audience frown while ten per cent giggles.

ENTERTAINING COLLEGE PICTURE . . .

● **FRESHMAN YEAR**; Universal picture and release; associate producer, George R. Bilson; director, Frank McDonald; screen play, Charles Grayson; original story by Thomas Ahearn and F. Maury Grossman; photography, Elwood Bredell; art director, Jack Otterson; film editor, E. Curtis; musical director, Charles Previn; music and lyrics by Harry Barris and Joe McCarty, Irving Actman and Frank Loesser. Cast: Constance Moore, William Lundigan, Dixie Dunbar, Stanley Hughes, Ernest Truex, Frank Melton, Tommy Wonder, Lucky Seven, Murtah Sisters, Diamond Brothers.

ONE for young people and people who can remember when they were young. The story covers a year in a fictional college and deals with members of the freshman class. There is more body to the story than usually is found in a college picture which embraces singing and dancing numbers; also there is more merit in the whole thing than usually is found in these low-budget productions which are turned

out more to fill sales obligations than to astonish the box-office. To raise money to get the leading man (William Lundigan) out of an awkward mess, the freshman class puts on a show, and it is one of the snappiest, most entertaining little shows I have seen on any screen. Another commendable feature is the manner in which the story's two romances are handled. If there is any love-making in the picture it is so incidental that I cannot recall it. The boys and girls are just good chums and we take the love for granted.

Direction, Performances Good . . .

THE script of Charles Grayson, made from an Ahearn-Grossman original story, was fortunate in being placed in the hands of Frank McDonald, a director with youth enough to keep the picture young and ability enough to keep it moving. He is one of the young directors—quite a veteran by this time in spite of his years—whose work always has interested me. Trained in the hard school of small budgets and abbreviated shooting schedules, he displays an appreciation of entertainment values which entitles him to bigger assignments. The *Freshman Year* cast is not composed of big names to give it box-office rating, but McDonald gives us a group of agreeable young people who play their parts with zest and understanding which make for good entertainment. Constance Moore has both beauty and brains, her performance being one of the many agreeable features of the picture. Dixie Dunbar, pert and pleasing; William Lundigan, Stanley Hughes and Frank Melton complete the group of young people cast in the leading roles, and all do well. Ernest Truex, always the capable comedian, is highly entertaining in the role of a member of the college faculty. All the technical features of the production were in capable hands. Musical numbers by Harry Barris and Joe McCarty, and by Irving Actman and Frank Loesser, add greatly to the appeal of the picture. Art direction by Jack Otterson is well up to the high standard of that capable young man.

COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER . . .

● **THREE LOVES HAS NANCY**; Metro picture and release; stars Janet Gaynor, Robert Montgomery and Franchot Tone; directed by Richard Thorpe; produced by Norman Krasna; screen play by Bella and Samuel Spewack, George Oppenheimer and David Hertz; from the story by Lee Loeb and Mort Braus; musical score by Dr. William Axt; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associate art directors, John Detlie and Edwin B. Willis; photographed by William Daniels; sound recording, Douglas Shearer; gowns by Adrian; film editor, Fredrick Y. Smith. Supporting cast: Guy Kibbee, Claire Dodd, Reginald Owen, Cora Witherspoon, Emma Dunn, Charley Grapewin, Lester Matthews, Grady Sutton, Mary Forbes, Grant Withers.

WILL make you laugh, but not as much as it should. It is the camera's literal translation of a script, with none of those flashes of directorial humor which made *My Man Godfrey*, *One Night of Love*, *The Awful Truth* such entirely agreeable cinematic incidents. *Three Loves Has Nancy* is pleasant enough entertainment, cost enough to make it so, but it dis-

appoints because it makes one think how much better it might have been without a change in a line of the script, with the same capable cast, but guided on its way to the screen by a Capra, a La Cava or a Lubitsch. Of course, I am estimating it purely as an example of the talkie technique which is responsible for the present box-office lassitude. I don't suppose there is one full minute in its running time when someone is not talking. But if I applied motion picture standards to my judgment of today's product, my reviews would consist only of general condemnation as boring to read as it would be to write, so while I prate about perfection in my Easy Chair, I try to stick to what I see on the screen when I write my reviews.

Visually Attractive Production . . .

NO FAULT can be found with the cast of *Nancy*. Nor can one complain of the script as an example of talkie writing, the pictorial impressiveness of the settings provided by that master of film architecture, Cedric Gibbons, or the fine quality of Bill Daniel's photography. It is the story's telling, not its physical attributes, that one finds disappointing. Phil Scheuer, in his *Times* review, said the settings are so much alike that one has difficulty in knowing where the characters are. Cedric was up against the fact that most of the acting takes place in two adjoining suites in the same building, necessitating the application of the same style of architecture to both. I agree with Phil that the result is more or less a geographic puzzle, but what could the poor art director do about it? Adrian had no such hampering influence in designing the gowns the women wore. They have much to do with the visual attractiveness of the production. And in the instance of Janet Gaynor's wardrobe, they convey a valuable lesson in the expert utilization of limited packing space. The Metro publicity department tells us that Adrian designed no less than sixteen gowns and dresses for her to wear in the picture. She is a small town girl who comes to the city where the gowns and dresses are worn. As I noted the many changes in costume, I wondered how Janet could have packed all of them in the small bag and the smaller one which constituted her entire supply of baggage.

Bob Montgomery's Picture . . .

WHAT satisfaction the picture gives is due principally to the spirited performance of Bob Montgomery. With his unforgettable characterization as the demented murderer in *Night Must Fall* as the standard by which he is to be judged as an actor, his talents seem wasted in such a frivolous part as the one he has in *Nancy*, but the zest and intelligence he puts into it, his expert realization of all the values of the role, are both a tribute to his versatility and an excuse for his casting. Franchot Tone, in a less assertive part than Bob's, is intelligently amusing as the publisher whom Claire Dodd wishes to marry while he wishes to marry Janet Gaynor. To end your suspense, I will tip you off to the fact that Montgomery marries Janet, thus departing from my

fixed habit of refraining from incorporating in my reviews any information you could get in a more entertaining manner when you see the story developed on the screen. Janet, in response to rather mechanical direction, gives a rather mechanical performance in a role, however, of a negative natural and which does not give her much latitude. All the other performances as creditable as the direction allowed. In little human pictures, Richard Thorpe was at home, but in the bigger ones he is getting now his direction does not realize all the story possibilities. There are irritating lapses in *Nancy*. For instance: Bob Montgomery, obviously a gentleman, enters an apartment in which a number of fashionable people are having a party; keeps his hat on as he airily greets the men and women present, wears it into the library and keeps it on during a conversation he has there with Claire Dodd, a beautiful girl with whom he had been in love when the story opens. Even a man without breeding removes his hat instinctively when entering a private home, whether or not there are women present; and the lowest lowbrow would not wear it in a drawing room when women are present. But Bob Montgomery, playing a highbrow, does just that in *Three Loves Has Nancy*.

SONJA AN UNLUCKY STAR . . .

● **MY LUCKY STAR:** 20th Century-Fox; executive producer, Harry Joe Brown; director, Roy Del Ruth; screen play, Harry Tugend and Jack Yellen; original story, Karl Tunberg and Don Ettlinger; music and lyrics, Mack Gordon and Harry Revel; skating ensembles staged by Harry Losee; photography, John Mescall; film editor, Allen McNeil; musical direction, Louis Silvers. Cast: Sonja Henie, Richard Greene, Joan Davis, Cesar Romero, Buddy Ebsen, Arthur Treacher, George Barbier, Louise Hovick, Billy Gilbert, Patricia Wilder, Paul Hurst, Elisha Cook, Jr., Robert Kellard, Brewster Twins, Kay Griffith, Charles Tannen, Paul Stanton, Ed Le Saint, Frederick Burton, Frank Jacquet, Arthur Jarrett.

SKATING, adult; story, childish. A poor mixture. Century shows as little realization of what it has in Sonja Henie as it has demonstrated in the case of Shirley Temple. There is this difference between the two stars; Shirley's personality runs an even course through each of her pictures, while Sonja's skating comes only in spots, which would indicate in the case of Sonja that her stories should be strong enough to keep us as interested in her as the heroine as we have admiration for her as a skater. She has raised skating to the status of an art as fine as that of the ballet; has developed the poetic quality



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of motion until it gets its most sympathetic response from those with sensibilities sufficiently refined to evaluate its beauty and with sufficient intelligence to appreciate what its perfection entailed in ceaseless and conscientious practice. An art so exquisite as she has made it should have a setting to match its dignity, a story as graceful as her contribution to a picture made from it. Here we have her in a cheap story with adolescent appeal, to which she contributes agility so graceful that only adult appreciation can recognize its values.

Elements Are At War . . .

THE esthetic appeal of Sonja's skating competes in *My Lucky Star* with a sordid drunken marriage, cheap college pranks and farcical interludes. An audience which can see the values in the skating, scarcely can be entertained by the elements which clash with it. It, therefore, is not a picture in which all its elements are for all its audience. Youngsters who will laugh at Billy Gilbert's roaring insistence that his customers shall have pistachio nuts—a vaudeville interpolation which checks the progress of the story—will be bored when Sonja skates; and those who can be entertained by Cesar Romero's efforts to get rid of Louise Hovick, whom he married when he was drunk, are not the kind of people who can see all the beauty in the skating. Whatever your tastes may be, to sit through what you do not like in *My Lucky Star* will prove too great a price to pay for waiting for what you like. If Century's sole purpose in making the picture had been to begin the end of Sonja's screen career, it could not have made a better job of it. But one can envision a series of pictures that would keep her near the top of the box-office list, a series in which her extraordinary skill and engaging personality were exploited in stories and setting as ingredients of perfect blends.

Tough Job for a Director . . .

EVEN the ability of Roy del Ruth, a director with many notable productions to his credit, was not equal to the task of making *My Lucky Star* a picture lucky for its star, but no one could make a better job of it than he did. A good picture simply was not in the story, and when a director is up against a proposition of that sort, all he can do is to do the best he can. Sonja's performance is the most believable of the lot. Buddy Ebsen and Joan Davis contribute some comedy brilliant enough to have a legitimate place in a picture of the sort Sonja should have—comedy that is clever and will appeal to intelligent

people. Richard Green, leading man, makes a good impression. Catchy and tuneful music, good lyrics, an adequate production with one particularly striking skating spectacle, are some of the picture's assets. But when we are asked to accept the skating spectacle as being staged in a department store transformed over night into an ice palace—well, that is going too far.

NOT ONE OF THE GOOD ONES . . .

● **WHILE NEW YORK SLEEPS**; 20th-Fox production and release; features Michael Whalen, Jean Rogers, Chick Chandler, Robert Kellard, Joan Woodbury, Harold Huber and Marc Lawrence; executive producer, Sol M. Wurtzel; director, H. Bruce Humberstone; screen play, Frances Hyland and Albert Ray; original story, Frank Fenton and Lynn Root; photography, Lucien Andriot; art directors, Bernard Herzbrun and David Hall; film editor, Norman Colbert; songs by Sidney Clare and Arthur Johnston; dances staged by Nick Castle and Geneva Sawyer; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Supporting cast: Sidney Blackmer, William Demarest, June Gale, Cliff Clark, Edward Gargan, Minor Watson, Robert Middlemass.

ORIGINAL story by Frank Fenton and Lynn Root contained some interesting situations which lose none of their entertainment value by the places given them in the competent screen play of Frances Hyland and Albert Ray. *While New York Sleeps* could have been made into one of the most entertaining little pictures of the season if Bruce Humberstone had made a better job of his direction. When I see so many faults in a picture, it sets me wondering how a director can commit them and how a producer can allow them to get onto the screen. They see the daily rushes, yet approve scenes which in the aggregate make an impossible picture out of one which could have been good entertainment if a little more ordinary sense had been displayed in its making. Take one sequence in this picture: Jean Rogers, a beautiful girl, refined type, is seated with Mike Whalen in what obviously is a fashionable cafe, patronized by discriminating people, if we may judge from those seated at other tables. Mike crowds Jean into a corner of their space in a most offensive attempt to make love to her in public, and she comes out of character by failing to see anything offensive in it, even though she is in love with a hometown boy.

When Murder Is Justified . . .

NEXT into the above scene comes Chick Chandler, clever comedian who can give a director any variety of performance asked for. He stands in the middle of the cafe floor, no nearer the couple than he is to several of the other patrons, and shouts lines to Whalen who shouts his answers. The dialogue has story significance, but is made irritatingly absurd by the manner of its delivery. A dozen or more scenes are murdered by equally absurd treatment. Whalen, the leading man, who should make his part earn the sympathy it must earn to make the picture entertaining, is presented as a conceited ass who plays an inexcusably dirty trick on the nice girl, whom, next to himself, he apparently loves. That capable actor, Harold Huber, who has many excellent performances



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to his credit, is presented here as a practical joker whose screams of laughter play havoc with the audience's nerves, which get relief only when someone mercifully murders him. Century may protest that *While New York Sleeps* is "just a class B picture," made cheaply, and should not be judged by meticulously critical standards by which the values of expensive pictures are judged. Class B productions of this sort are the most expensive entertainment the film industry is making, expensive because to them belongs the chief responsibility for present unsatisfactory box-office conditions. After viewing this one, those who are above the mental stature of morons probably will feel disinclined to take another chance at a picture house until the memory of it fades out.

NOTEWORTHY FOR ITS DIRECTION . . .

● **THE ROAD TO RENO;** Universal picture and release; director, S. Sylvan Simon; associate producer, Edmund Grainger; screen play by Roy Chanslor and Adele Comandini; story by Charles Kenyon and F. Hugh Herbert; based on the novel "The Road to Reno," by I. A. R. Wylie; photography, George Robinson; art director, Jack Otterson; associate art director, Charles H. Clarke; film editors, Maurice Wright and Paul Landres; gowns, Vera West; musical director, Charles Previn; assistant director, Vernon Keays; music by Jimmy McHugh; lyrics by Harold Adamson. Cast: Randolph Scott, Hope Hampton, Helen Broderick, Alan Marshall, Glenda Farrell, David Oliver, Samuel S. Hinds, Spencer Charters, Charles Murphy, Ted Osborne.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

A GAY and tuneful picture comes from Universal in *The Road to Reno*. What principally makes the piece noteworthy, however, is its direction. The story is a light affair, about a prima donna who journeys to Reno seeking a divorce, encounters her husband there and begins to change her mind, but Director S. Sylvan Simon has done a myriad of things with his material which will delight those who appreciate good cinema. Sylvan is especially alert to the importance of good transitional devices, and his picture abounds in them. The shot of a monkey on the train, made the object of some ambiguous statement, dissolves into a view of the cowboy husband at Reno; and there is a cleverly handled diary sequence, in which developments over a period of several weeks are made known through brief notations in a diary, each of which is followed by a bit of action, recounting the outcome of the plans set forth in writing. Action as a whole is breezy and whimsical, the director revealing a sense for comedy. Maximum humor is gotten from a perilous aeroplane ride, during which many stunts are performed for the benefit of the cowboy, who becomes deathly bilious.

Vocal Renditions Please . . .

MAKING her picture debut in the role of the prima donna, is Hope Hampton, noted songstress. She brings to the screen a voice of fine range and timbre, and the audience was greatly impressed with her renditions, especially the opening operatic excerpt. Comely and very blond, Miss Hampton won a favorable reaction throughout the picture. In a few scenes she revealed dramatic limitations, but her personality is

bright and engaging, and her debut in pictures can be regarded as a success. Randolph Scott gives a well-shaded performance as the cowboy, and Alan Marshall, as the wife's suitor, plays with an élan and humor which should raise his stock considerably in the filmic scheme of things. Glenda Farrell, trouper to her finger tips, performs with more nuances than you could shake a stick at, and Helen Broderick's brittle comedy is again effective. David Oliver, Spencer Charters, and Ted Osborne, a newcomer from radio, are among others who contribute competently done bits of action.

Photography Draws Applause . . .

THE picture has been finely mounted. Cinematographer George Robinson's out-of-doors scenes are rich photography, and two or three of the shots drew spontaneous applause from the audience. Jack Otterson and his associate, Charles H. Clarke, have provided sets replete with western flavor, and given the operatic sequence a glittering background. Some pleasant music has been written for the picture by Jimmy McHugh and Harold Adamson; Charles Previn has given it an enhancing setting, and opportune situations have been arranged in the story for it. Seems to me, in fact, that the picture could have benefited by the inclusion of another musical number, something spectacular with a choral background, which would serve to convert the film from a play with music into a musical play, taking emphasis off the story, which, notwithstanding some racy stretches of dialogue, is rather fragile in spots, reflecting that a few too many fingers figured in its concoction.

SUPERIOR WESTERN . . .

● **BILLY THE KID RETURNS;** Republic production and release; features Roy Rogers, Smiley Burnette and Mary Hart; associate producer, Charles E. Ford; directed by Joe Kane; original screen play by Jack Natteford; photographed by Ernest Miller; film editor, Lester Orleback; musical direction by Cy Feuer; songs by Eddie Cherkose, Alberto Colombo and Smiley Burnette. Supporting cast: Morgan Wallace, Fred Kohler, Sr., Wade Boteler, Edwin Stanley, Horace Murphy, Joseph Crehan, Robert Emmett Keane.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

IT HAS befallen my lot to preview a great number of Westerns within the past year, and these I approach with a certain amount of bias. I expect to find the same plot and the same stock situations with little enough to hold my interest. My compensation comes in the second feature on the screen. But not so in the case of *Billy the Kid Returns*. I had heard a lot of Roy Rogers, more because of his temporary replacing of Gene Autry than anything else. Put it down that I have been missing something. Roy Rogers has everything it takes—and more. I was struck by this young lad's voice, a low, mellow, well-modulated singing that could tear up a Western ballad or a sentimental ditty of the plains with color and quality. For my money the price of admission is well worth that alone. It is not in my bailiwick to discuss music. But I think I know a good song when I hear one. *Billy the Kid Returns* has an

outstanding collection of songs. Eddie Cherkose's *Trail Blazin'* and *Born to the Saddle* have lilt to them. And his tunes written in collaboration with Smiley Burnette, *Sing a Little Song* and *Dixie Instrument Song* are right in keeping with the spirit of the story. *When the Sun Is Setting On the Prairie*, written by Cherkose and Alberto Colombo, is another of those Western songs with just enough sadness to make it an appealing ballad. The music does not hold back the movement of the narrative. Westerns are *per se* action stories. It is to the credit of Writer Jack Natteford and Director Joe Kane that the music did not impede the action.

Lavish Production . . .

FOR a picture of this category, exploiting a comparatively unknown young player, *Billy the Kid Returns* is a lavish production. Associate Producer Charles E. Ford, in the second of the Roy Rogers series, has given his picture tasteful consideration. Roy Rogers plays a dual role. Mary Hart, whom I recognize as engaging Miss Lynn Roberts, is the heart interest. Outstanding is Wade Boteler as the peace officer. Cameraman Ernest Miller has some strikingly good photography and some fine action shots. Joe Kane invested the picture with quality direction. The change of pace between music and action was effected with ease. There was plenty of material for Film Editor Lester Orlebeck to choose from. Usually Westerns are shot on the cuff—the frayed end at that. Musical Direction by Cy Feuer was well done, unobtrusively in keeping with the spirit of the picture. All in all I should say this is about the best Western I have seen in a long time.

MUSIC IN CAPRA PICTURE

By Bruno David Ussher

RARELY has music been given such distinctive recognition as in the Columbia-Capra production of *You Can't Take It With You*. Playwright Robert Riskin voices some old and everlasting truths in this script. And none is less important than his delightful preachment about music. His Grandpa Vanderhof does not philosophize about art in general and music specifically, as an "escape". Just before he hits the bottom, he pulls out a mouth organ and floats himself "on the wings of song". The little boy who whistles in the dark to keep fear away, is the protagonist of the man who turns on the radio to find refuge from desolation either in the realm of Paul Whiteman or of Richard Wagner. From a human point of view, it does not matter which. At times, I myself prefer the former. Riskin is one of the greatest champions of music for everybody. Dmitri Tiomkin, who authored the musical score, emphasized the idea admirably. He had excellent assistance from Musical Director Maurice Stoloff, Assistant Director Arthur Black and Sound Engineer Ed Bernds. Music to be convincing must be used with

gusto and discretion and Tiomkin's score had both.

Fitting Title Score . . .

MUSICAL effects and tonal underlining is well calculated by Tiomkin from the main title on, when the music sheds some aural nimbus around the name of Director Capra. As in so many other pictures, the title music does not whang and bang without emotional direction. The music sets the keynote for the actual photographic scenes that open the film. It is light but agreeably attractive music, happy music for people who do not require a golden calf before they really can unload their real or imaginary difficulties and begin to have peace. Such music is very important today, as it was important in 1929 when bankers and similarly money-crazed men jumped from office windows because the margin between "to be or not to be" was so small they could not "foot" it. For the most part Tiomkin makes "happy" music and does so with the right feeling for the wants of the playwright and producer-director.

They Stay With You . . .

TO WRITE the right music and the suitable amount of music for a film the symbol of which is a mouth organ, so to speak, is a delicate task. This is all the more so because sometimes this uproariously funny film has a most serious meaning. It preaches a New Deal of Living. Tiomkin has erred only on the side of too little music. More could have been done in the scenes when Edward Arnold, in an hour of crucial decision, tosses away the mouth organ and all it implies, and how in the meeting with his defeated rival the little instrument slithers back toward him when inadvertently kicked by a doomed man. Perhaps Tiomkin was overruled. I do not know. But I think his treatment of the dancing episodes in the home when the girl practices in the living room and the only accompaniment, to speak of, is the xylophone (or little more than this instrument), are well managed. In any case, Tiomkin never uses a full orchestra when a very few instruments only are logical from a dramatic viewpoint. He has found some genuinely touching strains when the girl's letter is read, and the mood is well sustained when the helpless boy friend arrives. Last but not least the dynamic proportions between music and dialogue are excellently chosen, so that the meaning of words and music do not defeat each other. I short, you can take both with you. Indeed, they stay with you.

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Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—September 17, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 17

Operating on Scripts to Eliminate Excess
Dialogue Is Not the Proper Cure

When the Box-Office Is Sick, Film Doctors
Treat the Public, Not the Patient

No Picture Is Given Increased Audience
Interest by Color Photography

Kind of Publicity Pictures Are Being Given
Is Adding to Box-Office Worries

... REVIEWS ...

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From the EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

WRITERS' THOUGHT PROCESS . . .

WARNER writers have been assigned a difficult task, that of going over a dozen or more completed scripts in search of spots in which action can be substituted for dialogue. The intention is good. The film industry as a whole is finding it necessary to spend one million dollars in an effort to repair the damage too much dialogue has done the box-office. That is purely superficial treatment of the ailment and will prove about as efficacious as it would be to rub liniment on the stomach to cure indigestion. The Warner studio is the only one thus far which gives evidence of having realized the ailment must be treated at its source. But I fear for the patchwork method of its approach. Literary surgeons cannot cut out dialogue without leaving scars on scripts. The source of the trouble is the thought process of screen writers, and to make the cure permanent, the trouble must be attacked at its source. There are many brilliant writers in Hollywood, more than there are in any other one spot in the world, and they have demonstrated their ability to give producers what they want. The film box-office will not get the relief it needs until the thought process of screen writers is reversed and they give producers what they should have.

Weakness Is Fundamental . . .

WHEN a physician is called in on a case, his skill is not strained in his efforts to discover the effect of the illness. It is apparent on the surface, in the pulse, temperature, general condition of the patient. What the physician looks for is the reason for the condition, the fundamental weakness primarily responsible for it. Screen physicians called in to cure scripts should approach their tasks with as much thoroughness and with as deep concentration on the source of the weakness. They will find that in most cases it would be wiser to let the patient die and advise its parents to get another. When a script needs operating on to remove an excess of dialogue, it means it was born with a weakness practically incurable. The weakness is fundamental because the screen, in its true, and therefore its most sturdy, form, is a visual art, a medium for the presentation of entertainment for the eye to convey to the emotions. The scripts upon which the Warner literary doctors must operate were conceived on the assumption that the sound device had transformed the screen into an aural art, a medium for the presentation of entertainment for the ears to convey to the intellect. I believe there are records of operations which have been successful in changing the sex of humans, but they are extreme-

ly rare. Almost equally rare will be the complete success of operations to make as great a change in scripts.

Reconstructing a Quarrel . . .

THE place to begin the elimination of dialogue is in the head of the person who is to write the script. The brain child should be dumb from birth; as he grows up he should use the smallest possible number of words necessary to making his meaning clear. If he is developed intelligently, he will be surprised to find how few words it will be necessary for him to use to make his way in life and become a pleasant companion for those who meet him. In a picture I saw recently, a husband and wife have a violent quarrel; he stamps out of the house, down the path to the gate, hesitates there, stamps back, renews the quarrel in which both have a lot to say; finally the reconciliation. The story reason for his return to the wordy warfare was solely to reconcile the two, what each said being the tools with which the screen writer made gradual the approach to the reconciliation. You see, the writer had conceived characters who expressed themselves only in words, had made his entire script for the ears of the audience, not for its eyes. When he wanted the wife to go into the husband's arms, he thought only in words as a method of building to it, wrote solely for the microphone, the enemy of screen entertainment; not for the camera, its friend. Let us rewrite the part of the sequence in which the two are reconciled: The husband's indignant striding down the path; gradually slower until he comes into the camera; we see him smile, turn around, go back, the camera following him; a cut to the wife peering through the curtains, smiling; back to the husband's back as he enters the

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By Mabel Keefer

"What is that slogan soundin' for?" said Files-on-Parade.
"To bring you back, to bring you back," the Colour-Sergeant said.

"What makes you look so bored, so bored?" said Files-on-Parade.

"I'm so bored by what I've got to watch," the Colour-Sergeant said.

For they're spendin' of a million; you can hear the dollars clink;

The industry's on dress parade—they're handin' out the chink;

They've polished all its buttons up and an' used a lot o' ink,

An' they're spendin' of a million on the movies.

house, crosses the hall, opens the door to the room in which his wife waits; over his shoulder as the door opens we see the wife smiling at him; he enters the room, closes the door; fade out, leaving us outside.

Visual Terms Save Money . . .

WHILE viewing the picture I refer to above, I was not thinking along the lines of the present discourse, but as I recall the entire film I have the impression that if its writer had thought in visual terms, he would have turned in a script containing less than half the dialogue he made his audience listen to, would have found his task much easier, would have given us a picture I would have praised instead of one I condemned in my review, and would have given his studio a script it could have shot more quickly, consequently at less cost, because of the number of silent scenes in it. I do not identify the writer by name, as there would be implied a criticism of his work which I do not intend. He undoubtedly gave his studio exactly what it wanted, got paid for it, and, I hope, shrugged his shoulders and muttered, "What the hell!" Like most of the other writers, he could write in pictorial language if his employers had intelligence enough to demand it. And unless all of them demand it, and get it before the million dollar shot in the arm loses its effect, there will be a call for a second million to give the public another jolt.

* * *

COLOR AND THE BOX-OFFICE . . .

ONE producer hallucination which would be amusing if it were not so costly, is that color photography adds box-office value to a picture. When a picture whose entertainment values make it a box-office success, happens to have been shot in color, producers attribute its success to the photography, gravely declare the public suddenly has developed a yen for color, and announce that a lot of color pictures will be included in the next season's production program. I have noticed, however, that half the pictures announced for color treatment do not get it. Color in itself has no box-office value. If the audience is conscious of it as an isolated contribution to a picture, it becomes an element which attracts attention at the expense of the story; if the audience is not conscious of it, if the story is strong enough to hold the attention of the audience, as it must be to make the picture a box-office success, the money spent in providing color is wasted. An elemental rule of all the arts is that there must not be in any art creation an element which isolates itself and draws attention to itself at the expense of the creation as a whole. But picture making, Hollywood will tell you, is a business, not an art. When it awakens to the fact that the stability of its business depends upon the standard of its art, it will not find it necessary to blow in an extra million dollars in an effort to drum up customers.

REVERSE-ACTION PUBLICITY . . .

WHEN we are handing out blame for the present unsatisfactory state of film theatre box-offices, we must not overlook the publicity departments of the major producing organizations. If the aim of the publicists had been to do the greatest possible harm to the film business, they scarcely could have been more successful in achieving the aim than they have been while aiming in the opposite direction. Radio broadcasting of synopses of pictures has been one of the major insanities included in exploitation policies. Exhibitors have told me of instances in which return of admission money has been demanded of them on the score that dissatisfied ticket purchasers have seen the picture before, even though the picture was then having its first run in the community. In each case the patron was sincere, as he had heard most of the story by radio and thought he was getting something old when the picture was shown. Another blow at the box-office is the encouragement publicity departments give columnists to make public what should be film secrets. *Life* magazine was given publicity stills to illustrate how the public was fooled by the freight train sequence in *Professor, Beware!* And that is but one of the hundreds of blows press agents have aimed at picture box-offices.

* * *

FILM DOCTORS IN CONSULTATION . . .

CREDITED to Nicholas Schenck is this bit of wisdom: "The film industry can have no ills that good pictures cannot cure." The film industry is ill now, its box-office suffering from a disquieting case of malnutrition. The Drs. Schenck, Dr. Zukor, Dr. Kent, the Drs. Warner, in fact, the entire medical board of the industry, held a consultation, considered gravely the sharp drop in the patient's box-office temperature, failed to recognize the heavy coating on the patient's tongue as a significant symptom, agreed that its pulse was too low, and decided that a million dollar shot in the arm of the public, not the patient, was the proper treatment. No thought seems to have been given the fact that if good pictures would effect a cure, they also would have prevented the illness. There is no more excuse for the present plight of the film industry than there would be for a stone image to catch the measles. One can quite understand the faith of the film barons in the potency of money as a cure for film ills. The whole philosophy of their approach to picture making is that a picture which costs one million dollars must have twice the drawing power of one which costs half as much. They think a million dollars spent in exploitation will make the public want pictures which, without the million, it would not want.

When Ignorance Is Bliss . . .

A COUPLE of lines in *Los Angeles Examiner* reveals a typical example of picture thinking: "Picture executives, convinced that musicals are poison at

the box-office, have none on 1939 production schedules." The fact that there are no musicals on some schedules would seem to point to the accuracy of the *Examiner* writer in giving the reason. We have, then, the spectacle of a group of studio executives—the salary of any one of whom would make a generous salary per head for the others if divided among the lot—solemnly acting upon its conviction that the public would spurn a picture because it is a musical and without regard for the degree of entertainment value it might possess; in other words, that the public would refuse to be entertained by an entertaining musical picture. Like many other manifestations of the thought process of those in whose hands lies the destiny of the film industry as a whole, this one is more like a superstition than a product of clear business reasoning. There is something childishly ingenuous in the attitude of executives. I do not doubt for a moment that they are honest in their belief that fickleness of public taste is responsible for the failure of musicals to maintain their drawing power. If you told them the truth—that the blame belongs solely to them because they do not know how to make musicals which will continue to entertain the public—if you told them that, they would have a good laugh, tell you you are a very funny fellow, and your joke would go galloping up and down studio corridors.

* * *

PICTURES AND THEIR PEOPLE . . .

ONE of my real favorites is Ann Sothorn, soon to appear in Tay Garnett's *Trade Winds*, her first picture since last October. Sensible girl; got RKO to cancel her contract, takes only parts she likes; turned down a couple of dozen before accepting Tay's. . . . Good acting is not always good for the actor. Bela Lugosi, skilled actor, happened to be cast in a "horror" role; did so well, others of a like nature followed; became typed; horror pictures went out, and now Lugosi is finding it difficult to make a living, even though the public would give him a cordial greeting in a sympathetic role. There always is a market for good acting. . . . Olivia de Havilland's cultivated and musical voice is among the most pleasant on the screen. . . . Occurs to me that if the film industry wished to be perfectly honest about it, the billboards of the country would be adorned with, "Motion Pictures Could Be Your Best Entertainment." . . . A screen memory: W. C. Fields inheriting a lot of money in *Call It a Day*, smashing into the car of a road hog; buying a new car and repeating the process until he got out of his system all the things he had yearned to do when he could afford but one car. . . . I am about ready to see Katharine Hepburn on the screen again if they give her a part in which she can play the girl, not herself. . . . Glad to see Joe von Sternberg back in harness. . . . Five years ago, in reviewing a picture directed by Edward Ludwig, I said some day he would be batting in the big league; from what I hear about his direction of the Deanna Durbin new picture, I believe my prophesy is about to come true. . . . I want to see *Carefree*

again for another look at Fred Astaire's rhythmic golf swing; think my game has suffered by my failure to sing when I swing. . . . Columbia's pictures open with the most unattractive studio identification emblem, Universal's with the most attractive; but occasionally some of the others rise to artistic heights. It is a poor commentary on the film industry's efficiency when a picture like *A Letter of Introduction* has to be teamed with a gangster picture to fill out an evening's entertainment. . . . Glad to see Billy Gilbert in another picture in which he does not sneeze. . . . An entry in the notebook I have with me at all times: "Wally, GR. 6455." Waldemar Young gave me his phone number, telling me to call him up and the four of us (our wives) would have dinner together; it was my last chat with a good friend, agreeable companion and true gentleman. . . . As long as pictures are composed so largely of dialogue, it might be a good idea now and then to treat the audience to a beautifully worded speech, one which by developing the charm which words can have, if given to a character who logically could read it, would have distinct entertainment value. . . . Harry Langdon's return to pictures is an isolated instance of the screen's return to sanity. . . . If good wishes were winged things whose flights were visible in the Hollywood sky, we could see today a million of them darting in the direction of the hospital room of Bill Powell.

* * *

LITTLE PROSPECT OF SHOOTING . . .

A SUBSCRIBER writes to ask me why I have tried the Department of Justice's case against the major film companies and handed down a verdict in favor of the government. "When a matter gets into the courts none of us knows how it is going to come out," he writes. "The verdict may be in favor of the defendants and we may still have block booking, etc." My correspondent seems to overlook the fact that back of the government stands a congress ready to do anything to the film industry that the courts leave undone. If block booking is not abolished by court action, it will be by legislation. But I do not think either the courts or congress will effect the reforms the film industry needs for its own good. It will be another case like that of the coon which looked down from a tree to the hunters below, and said, "Don't shoot; I'll come down."

* * *

DUFFY UNCOVERING TALENT . . .

THAT El Capitan College of the Theatre is doing fine work was impressed upon me last week when I visited the cosy little Las Palmas Theatre and saw *Michael and Mary*, the A. A. Milne three-act play which enjoyed considerable popularity in its day. With a cast composed wholly of young players who are being trained in Henry Duffy's extraordinarily successful institution, the play provided an evening of real entertainment which asked little concession to the fact that those playing the parts were making their first appearances on the stage. I was impressed particularly with those who played the title roles,

Glen Langan and Audrey Smith. Jim Valentine Rose is a juvenile who shows promise, and Virginia Davis registers personality that some day will make her a great film favorite. And if Langan's name is not included in screen credits before long, it will be a reflection on the alertness of the scouts who are supposed to be ever on the lookout for new talent. The college presents a new play at the Las Palmas each week, and if all of them maintain the standard set by *Michael and Mary*, I can recommend the little theatre as a place to spend a pleasant evening. This week's bill is *Spring Dance*, which I have not got around to yet; next week, *Doll's House*, to be followed with *Call It a Day*.

* * *

WHAT HOLLYWOOD WOULD DO . . .

IF HOLLYWOOD producers were in a position to apply their conception of screen entertainment to all the great handiworks of nature, the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, Crater Lake, majestic mountain peaks and other scenic wonders whose beauty is emphasized by the silence which enfolds them, would be wired for sound.

* * *

HARMONY AND THE BOX-OFFICE . . .

THE motion picture business will not experience the even level of prosperity possible to it until the camera is restored to its rightful place as the screen's principal story-telling medium. It will not be restored until scenarists prepare their scripts for the camera instead of for the microphone, until every line of dialogue is gone over carefully in a completed script and the final decision arrived at that the thought it expresses cannot be expressed in pictorial terms. And even then motion pictures will not achieve the popularity possible for them until the lines which are left are spoken by casts in conversational tones when such tones are demanded, and loud talking is allowed only when moods of scenes demand it. It is not loud talking itself which robs so many scenes of conviction. Nothing included in a screen creation by demand of the creation itself can disturb its harmony. But when a scene demands low tones and the audience is given loud tones, the harmony of the creation is disturbed, and disturbed harmony is not good box-office.

* * *

GOLD AND ENTERTAINMENT . . .

HOLLYWOOD had an opportunity to lower production costs to keep pace with the depression and its little boy, the recession, but took the opposite direction, increased costs, and followed the illogical course of trying to buy prosperity instead of earning it with entertainment values. In current big pictures, everything that glitters is gold.

* * *

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

BO PEEP, the Pekinese, has become insufferably snooty since Jeanette MacDonald carried her in a scene in the new MacDonald-Eddy picture. . . . Funny way we, as a group, have of doing business in this tax-ridden state; we pass a law to permit horse-racing which makes a few already rich people richer

by handing them the greater part of the betting money, which is making poor people poorer. The sport of kings has become the graft of deuces. . . . Our second crop of roses is coming along fine. . . . Bo Peep's squatty architecture not being adapted to the physical vigor of long country hikes, has made it necessary for the Spaniel and me to exercise much cunning each morning in eluding her as we set forth; sometimes we fail, and she peers mournfully through the gate despite my assurance of sympathy. This morning the mournful look was too mournful for me; I went back, opened the gate, told her to come along. She refused; just sat there, and now I feel that her morning mourning has been her expression of sympathy for a man and a dog foolish enough to turn their backs on a home where there are bones which can be gnawed. . . . A photo of a blind man being guided through street traffic by a Seeing Eye dog, always does something to me. These magnificently noble animals ask no pay, but just a chance to go on acting as eyes for those who have none. . . . I started writing in the early morning sun, and now we will pause for a moment while I move over to the shade of the locust tree, where Freddie and Bo Peep preceded me and are engaged in sham battles with Percy and Minnie, our rapidly growing kittens. And here come Sophie and her four offsprings which we have been unable thus far to segregate into ducks and duckesses. Manchester, the biggest of the lot, makes a specialty of pecking at my shoelaces. Did any of you writers ever try to concentrate on your writing when a stalwart young duck was pecking at your shoelaces? . . . That infernal scraper has just grunted past our place again, smoothing out the bumps in our dirt road as an invitation to more cars to come whizzing along it. If I could borrow a plow, I'd hitch Freddie and Bo Peep to it and run furrows from curb to curb—I mean, to the places curbs would be if dirt roads had curbs. . . . Eugene, the colored person who does chores about the place, yesterday deposited the garbage can at the side of the road, and started work among the shrubs near it, his back to the road; a truck stopped behind him and with the idea of doing its driver a good turn, Eugene took the lid off the can and dumped the garbage into the truck. The ensuing heated argument was due to the fact that it wasn't the garbage truck. . . . Manchester must think I tie my shoes with worms. . . . He was prominent in the days of silent pictures, an actor who drew big money; he and his wife did not spend in that era of spending, were looked upon as tightwads, were not popular socially or professionally; talking pictures forgot the prominent actor; he is seen only rarely now, never doing anything bigger than a bit; but he owns his own home, is putting his boy and girl through college; each of the four members of the family has a car, and I know that several former spenders, who used to call him tightwad and who, too, have been overlooked by talkies, long since have discovered that the purse strings of the tightwad never seem to be tied. . . . There, Manchester, I hope you're satisfied, now that you have untied both my shoes.

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

WE APPLAUD A BUILDING . . .

● **BOYS TOWN**; Metro picture and release; director, Norman Taurog; producer, John W. Considine, Jr.; screen play by John Meehan and Dore Schary; from an original story by Dore Schary and Eleanore Griffin; musical score by Edward Ward; musical arrangements, Leo Arnaud; art director, Cedric Gibbons; associate art directors, Urie McCleary and Edwin B. Willis; photography, Sidney Wagner; montage effects, Slavko Vorkapich; film editor, Elmo Veron. Cast: Spencer Tracy, Mickey Rooney, Henry Hull, Leslie Fenton, Gene Reynolds, Edward Norris, Addison Richards, Minor Watson, Jonathan Hale, Bobs Watson, Martin Spellman, Mickey Rentschler, Frankie Thomas, Jimmy Butler, Sidney Miller, Robert Emmett Keane, Victor Killian.

A TRULY great picture. The studio which failed to move us with all the glory, glamour and glitter of the French court at the peak of its brilliance, failed to make us weep for Antoinette as she marched up steps to the death awaiting her at the top, in *Boys Town* brings lumps to our throats by showing us mortar being mixed, beams being sawed, bricks placed upon bricks; and makes us applaud a close-up of the building which the motion picture camera erected while we watched. Perhaps in some other picture a building has been applauded, but this was the first time I had applauded one. The building was a symbol, a physical realization of the faith of a great man who had endeared himself to me; it was to be a factory whose raw material was homeless boys, and product men. First, the picture shows us what homeless boys really are, the evil the world does to them and the evil they will do the world if they are to grow to manhood without knowing what home means or being exposed to its beneficial influence.

Simplicity Is Its Strength . . .

PURELY a social preachment—in the abstract, unpromising story material for motion picture entertainment—*Boys Town* comes to the screen as a gripping human document with all the elements which make for box-office success. In real life it is the realized dream of Father Flanagan, a noble priest who was present in person at the preview; on the screen its motivating force is the spiritual quality, the great understanding and the superb artistry of Spencer Tracy in the role of Father Flanagan. It is not the story which gives life to the picture, not the sermon it preaches which makes it entertaining, for sermons are not box-office. The picture gets its strength from the simplicity of its appeal to the audience, the emotional response it compels, the sympathetic interest it creates. It achieves what all pictures should aim at achieving—the successful presentation in simple terms of story material with which the audience entertains itself. That means picture making at the peak of perfection. Take the instance of the emotional response to the erection of the building which the camera wizardry of Slavko Vorkapich raises before our eyes. Previous sequences had made us yearn for the successful culmination of Spencer's efforts to get money for his home for the

homeless. We fail to see how he can be successful against the odds he faces. Then we see a plow cut a furrow and shovels at work, the skeleton of a building, the completed building. The picture has made Spencer's dream ours, and our dream is realized. Our emotions rose in step with the rising building, and tears topped them as the roof topped the building.

Harmonious Emotional Pattern . . .

WHEN I view a picture which moves me as profoundly as *Boys Town* did, I have difficulty in getting down to earth in writing my review of it. I still see it as a whole, this morning after; as an even, smooth, harmonious emotional pattern composed of brilliant pieces which lose their individual identities in the completeness of the effect the whole pattern creates. For instance: I suppose Cedric Gibbon's settings should be mentioned, but I did not see them, never gave a thought to them. I was aware only of the human drama being enacted by real people in their natural surroundings. Nor did I see actors, not even Spencer Tracy, the actor; I saw only a great person with a great mission. I was not a critic sitting out in front. Ordinary pictures make me one, and during their running I make mental notes of things to write in my reviews. Not so last evening. One cannot find flaws in a perfect picture nor pick out high spots in one composed wholly of them. Producer Considine's Irish heart seemed to have got into the picture, his masterpiece to date; and in his direction the gifted Norman Taurog revealed again his deep understanding of child psychology and his skill in handling children. Those who had a hand in building the screen play did not have a standard story to tell, one with hero, villain, romance and thrills; but it was what they did with what they did have that made the great results possible. Dore Schary collaborated with Eleanore Griffin in writing the original story, and with John Meehan in writing the screen play. All Sidney Wagner's photography was good, some of his shots superb. In the long cast there are no weak spots. Leslie Fenton does a dramatic scene brilliantly. Mickey Rooney, of course, is outstanding. Henry Hull handles an important part splendidly, and Edward Norris, Addison Richards and Jonathan Hale register strongly. It goes without saying that all the children gave perfect performances.

BETTY BURBRIDGE

... Writer ...

R e p u b l i c

Children always do, and begin to slip only when they begin to learn how to act.

ANOTHER YOU MUST SEE . . .

● **HOLD THAT CO-ED**; Twentieth Century-Fox; producer, Darryl F. Zanuck; associate producer, David Hempstead; director, George Marshall; screen play, Karl Tunberg, Don Ettlinger and Jack Yellen; original story, Karl Tunberg and Don Ettlinger; music and lyrics, Mack Gordon, Harry Revel, Lew Pollack, Lew Brown, Sidney Clare, Jule Styne and Nicholas Castle; dances, Nicholas Castle and Geneva Sawyer; photographer, Robert Planck; art directors, Bernard Herzbrun and Hans Peters; set decorator, Thomas Little; film editor, Louis Loeffler; costumes, Royer; musical director, Arthur Lange. Cast: John Barrymore, George Murphy, Marjorie Weaver, Joan Davis, Jack Haley, George Barbier, Ruth Terry, Donald Meek, Johnny Downs, Paul Hurst, Guinn Williams, Brewster Twins, Bill Benedict, Frank Sully, Charles Wilson, Glenn Morris, Dora Clement, Russell Hicks, Ruth Warren, Forbes Murray, Harry Hayden, Clem Bevans, John Dilson, John Elliott, Frank Jaquet, Fred Kohler, Jr.

A BOX-OFFICE bull's-eye. About the time it is released throughout the land, two topics of conversation will lead all others—football and politics. *Hold That Co-Ed* is about both, and that should give it a good start with any audience. I would not say it is the best football picture I ever saw, for to reach that decision would put too great a strain on my memory to recall all the others, but I am quite sure that you and I never saw a better one. For downright cleverness, few pictures I have seen in years can approach it. It satirizes both football and politics, is funny enough to keep the audience laughing heartily nearly all the time it is running, yet there are flashes of football in it that will stir the sporting instincts of any follower of the game. As always is the case when satire is handled cleverly, *Hold That Co-Ed* takes itself seriously and lets the audience do the laughing. As is quite appropriate for a football picture, the script for this one came out of a huddle participated in by Karl Tunberg and Don Ettlinger, who provided the original story, and who had Jack Yellen to help out on the screen play. A man named Yellen certainly ought to be able to contribute something worthwhile to any screen play which embraces both college football and a political campaign.

Joan Davis Is Triumphant . . .

A CAMPAIGN for the United States Senate can create excitement, but it has no way of building to a last-second climax that will bring the populace howling to its feet, so that feature of the picture is entrusted to its football element. True to football picture traditions, this one perches a last-second victory on the banner of the college we want to see win, but not until you see *Hold That Co-Ed* have you seen a climax which out-thrills all that have gone before it and makes you shriek with laughter while you are tingling with excitement. Joan Davis, that extremely clever comedienne who scores a triumph in every part she plays, is the co-ed whom the opposing team fails to hold. I can recall nothing else I have seen on the screen as funny and exciting as her battle with a gale to score the deciding touchdown. And certainly I can recall no more brilliant comedy per-

formance than that of our great American Hamlet, John Barrymore. The versatility of the man is amazing. I am sure Jack had the time of his life playing the part. As well as being one of the greatest legitimate actors the modern stage has developed, he also is a peerless comedian. In this picture he plays a part without doubt inspired by the late Huey Long of Louisiana. Jack is governor of an un-named state and carries on much as Long did.

George Marshall's Fine Direction . . .

ADD the superbly graceful dancing of George Murphy to the fun and thrills of *Hold That Co-Ed*, and you have something. Besides being one of the screen's finest dancers, Murphy acts acceptably any part assigned him and also possesses an agreeable singing voice which he knows how to use. His singing in *Hold That Co-Ed* impressed me to the point of suspicion, so I telephoned Milt Howe out at the Fox studio and asked him if George really sang or if the voice was dubbed in. Milt assured me that George did the singing. And that settles it, for Milt is a member of Harry Brand's publicity staff, and no member of a studio publicity staff ever was known to tell an untruth or even to exaggerate. But—sssh!—I am going to ask George if he can produce another witness. Under the direction of George Marshall all the members of the long cast turn in nice performances. Direction throughout could not have been excelled. I have never known Marshall previously to have revealed such a keen sense of humor, a fact explained, no doubt, by his failure to have been given scripts which provided him with opportunities to display his full ability for developing all the possibilities of comedy situations. Music figures largely in the production, all the singing numbers being spirited, tuneful and full of college atmosphere. Robert Planck's photography has fine quality, some shots being remarkable examples of skilful use of the camera.

COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER . . .

● **TOO HOT TO HANDLE**; MGM; producer, Lawrence Weingarten; director, Jack Conway; screen play, Laurence Stallings and John Lee Mahin; based on story by Len Hammond; musical score, Franz Waxman; recording director, Douglas Shearer; art director, Cedric Gibbons; special effects, Arnold Gillespie; photographer, Harold Rosson; montage effects, John Hoffman; film editor, Frank Sullivan. Cast: Clark Gable, Myrna Loy, Walter Pidgeon, Walter Connolly, Leo Carrillo, Johnny Hines, Virginia Weidler, Betty Ross Clarke, Henry Kolker, Marjorie Main, Gregory Gaye, Al Shean, Willie Fung, Lillie Mui, Patsy O'Connor.

ENTERTAINING, but nothing extraordinary. While the film industry is spending one million dollars in a crazy effort to undo the damage too much talking has done, Metro gives us this picture with a story subject which cries for camera treatment, and crams it to the neck with dialogue which the director makes more aggravating by having his players shout it at us. The idea behind the picture is a good one; newsreels are part of our everyday life, they interest us and it would interest us to get a glimpse behind the scenes to see how the great newsreel organizations

work, how they manage to get an explosion in Chicago, a parade in Rome and a sandstorm on the Gobi Desert on the same reel. *Too Hot to Handle*, as far as I know, is the first picture to tackle the subject. To do it justice—which is another way of saying, to develop all the box-office value there is in it—the subject should have been given the right of way and the players presented as of secondary consideration, as people whose single idea is to shoot a scene and get the film to the head office with the least possible delay. That would have made the characters heroic and the picture dramatic.

Rather Amusing Entertainment . . .

WHAT the picture shows us is what a slick fellow Clark Gable is in outlicking the other fellows who are competing with him where photographic news is happening. As such it is amusing entertainment, but comes a long way short of being the arresting picture it would have been if full advantage had been taken of the possibilities of the story material. If we are to accept it as revealing true conditions, there will be a lessening of our respect for those who go to the far corners of the world to send back pictures of what is going on there. It is all right to treat in similar manner subjects we already know quite a lot about—as, for instance, Century treats football in *Hold That Co-Ed*—but as *Too Hot to Handle* is the first comprehensive treatment of the newsreel industry any studio has given us, it is reasonable that we should accept it as an authentic presentation of the manner in which the industry operates. However, this review will be more enlightening, perhaps, if I confine myself to a discussion of what the picture presents and say no more about what I feel it should have presented.

Outstanding In the Cast . . .

NEXT to the noise it makes, the outstanding feature of the picture is its wide geographic sweep and the many visually interesting scenes it contains. If it had been written for the camera instead of for the microphone, the same story could have been told with at least half as much dialogue as we are forced to listen to. Clark Gable gives his standard performance and probably will hold the sympathy of his fans in spite of the character's low ethical standards. Myrna Loy was up against it to make us believe such a wholly feminine person could perform deeds it would be heroic for men to perform, but she gets away with it and without loss of her feminine charm. Walter Pidgeon contributes another of his dependable performances, and Walter Connolly, always the complete master of any situation in which he finds himself, makes a big contribution to whatever satisfaction the picture will give. Leo Carrillo, an actor who never fails to delight his audience, has a prominent part which he makes one of the outstanding features of the production. Marjorie Main and Henry Kolker are others whose work is to be commended. Laurence Stallings and John Lee Mahin, writers of the screen play, do not come within the scope of my criticism of the story, without doubt

having given the studio just what it wanted. The same goes for Jack Conway's direction. He gives the script vigorous treatment, although I wish he had coaxed his players to put less vigor in their delivery of dialogue.

FUNNY, BUT NOT CLEVER . . .

● **ROOM SERVICE**; RKO release of a Pandro S. Berman production; stars Groucho, Chico and Harpo Marx; director, William A. Seiter; screen play by Morrie Ryskind; from play by John Murray and Allan Boretz as produced by George Abbott; musical director, Roy Webb; photography, J. Roy Hunt; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate art director, Al Herman; assistant to the director, Philip Loeb; gowns, Renie; assistant director, James Anderson; film editor, George Crone. Supporting cast: Lucille Ball, Ann Miller, Frank Albertson, Donald MacBride, Cliff Dunstan, Philip Loeb, Philip Wood, Alexandro Asro, Charles Halton.

BOISTEROUS, elemental farce which follows the stage play closely (Louella Parsons); which does not follow the stage play closely (Edwin Schallert). I am in no position to settle the matter as—as I have stated before—I keep away from plays I know I am going to see on the screen, the idea being that I wish to see the pictures as film audiences will see them, without any previous knowledge of what is going to happen. All I know was that RKO had paid \$255,000 for the *Room Service* screen rights. After viewing the picture I feel that the RKO money was not spent in a manner to yield the greatest possible return in the way of story material for the Marx Brothers. For the same amount I am sure the studio could have purchased two hundred and fifty-five farces equally as funny, a supply of story material which, at two pictures a year, would have lasted the Marx trio one hundred and twenty-seven years, six months, which would prove quite long enough for one trio to stick together. Not that *Room Service* is not funny; it is, but it comes a long way short of having a quarter of a million dollars' worth of cleverness in it.

Lacking In Basic Appeal . . .

AMONG the many things ninety-nine and nine-tenths per cent of film audiences are not interested in is the difficulty a Broadway producer has in putting on a play. *Room Service* therefore lacks basic general appeal; the viewer this side of the Hudson cannot project himself into it. He merely can look at it from a distance—and the farther the distance, the more agreeable to his ears will be the noise it makes. I am basing my criticism on the terrific cost of the story material, a consideration, of course, which is of interest only to Hollywood. Of general interest, however, is the fact that *Room Service* does not even resemble a motion picture. The film industry is spending one million dollars in what will prove a vain effort to restore the prosperity it once enjoyed. It is not aware that it talked itself out of prosperity, that with such pictures as this one it is increasing its illness while it is applying what it considers to be a remedy. Photographed dialogue never can equal photographed action in box-office value. An audience can laugh without restraint at a visually funny scene. During the showing of *Room Service* laughter was

checked by the constant flow of dialogue. The only completely satisfactory picture is one which permits the audience to laugh without feeling it is losing anything.

Seiter Gives Good Direction . . .

BUT taking the picture as it is and not as it should be, we have to credit Director Seiter with developing all the values the script contained. He keeps it moving at the rapid pace a farce must have to be successful, and overcomes in a large measure the handicap imposed upon him by the restricted area in which he had to work, most of the action being confined to one room. Another difficulty was the overdose of dialogue, but into the stream of talk Seiter managed to inject some visual flashes of humor which added greatly to the fun. As for the Marx Brothers, I do not think they were good casting in the various parts. They do better in a production with greater physical sweep, such as *A Night At the Opera*. The *Room Service* background is too restricted for their brand of comedy. Donald MacBride, a member of the New York stage cast, gives his stage performance in the picture, and demonstrates, by contributing the worst characterization of the lot, that stage technique does not belong on the screen. If Pan Berman, head of RKO production, is ambitious to make a record he can point to with pride, he'd better get back into the motion picture business. Given motion picture treatment, *Room Service* could have become an outstanding contribution to the season's gaiety.

PATRONS ARE AWAITING IT . . .

● **SONS OF THE LEGION**; Paramount picture and release; director, James Hogan; associate producer, Stuart Walker; original story and screen play by Lillie Hayward, Lewis Foster and Robert F. McGowan; photography, Charles Schoenbaum; art direction, Hans Dreier and William Flannery; edited by Anne Bauchens; sound recording, Hugo Grenzbach and Glenn Rominger; interior decorations, A. E. Freudeman; musical direction, Boris Morros. Cast: Lynne Overman, Evelyn Keyes, Donald O'Connor, Elizabeth Patterson, William Frawley, Tim Holt, Billy Cook, Billy Lee, Edward Pawley, Richard Tucker, Tom Dugan, Keith MacKenzie.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

A FILM with both a purpose and a tie-up is *Sons of the Legion*. Produced with the cooperation of American Legion officials, it treats with the expanding of the auxiliary for sons of the ex-soldiers, is to be released during the week of September 18 when the legionnaires are assembled in Los Angeles for their national convention. The national release of the picture will signal the start of a nation-wide campaign to enlist eligible youngsters in the organization, for the picture is couched in simple enough terms for children to absorb the information and succumb to the enthusiasms it would impart. Hence, there is a wide public already awaiting the film, in sympathy with its viewpoints and sentiments and disposed to view it favorably. This favorably disposed group will doubtless be augmented by many patrons who will view the film as a step toward acquiring a share of \$250,000. This seems to be a perfect production and distribution set-up. I am not certain there is any

object in discussing the film in the light of artistic merit. However, there may be a few who will view the picture objectively, so here goes.

Characters Become Mouthpieces . . .

CONSIDERING the material with which he had to work, Director James Hogan has done a clean piece of story telling. The more than fifty youngsters who dominate the action, he has handled with understanding and directorial skill, getting spirited and sensitive performances from them; and the adult scenes he has imbued with the flavor of homeliness now coming into favor in picture treatments. Those of the public who are not under one of the influences cited, however, are likely to find the picture too naive for their approbation. All the good little boys are very good, the bad ones very bad—except the waif who comes under the influence of the young legionnaires and forthwith becomes absorbed in reading the Bible. Similarly all the papa legionnaires are good men and true, while the one culprit is surely a devil. There is this consideration too—many spectators may not like being preached at, even assuming they are in complete accord with what is being preached. For the picture is propaganda, however you look at it. More than once the characters obviously become mouthpieces to dispense the messages of the authors, very evidently so when a foreign youngster delivers a rhetorical suummary, extemporaneously, of why he wants to be an American citizen, and, inferentially, a legionnaire. This may be effective propaganda, but it is bad drama. I must point out, however, that this is my personal reaction. This sort of thing may be right up the alley of a great many people. Exhibitors should be able to anticipate the reaction of their patrons.

Children Are Clever . . .

OUTSTANDING among the children is Donald O'Connor as the little tough boy. His recital of the David and Goliath proverb in gangster vernacular thoroughly tickled the audience. Billy Cook and Billy Lee do well, and a mere tot, Keith MacKenzie, son of the American Legion national conference director, held his own with the best of them. Lynn Overman, droppig his wisecracking mannerisms, gives a performance of admirable sincerity as a father who cannot join the legion because of a dishonorable discharge from the army. Tim Holt is personable as the youthful organizer of the movement, and Evelyn

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Keyes, Elizabeth Patterson and William Frawley are well cast.

LOVE VERSUS A CAREER . . .

● **UNDER THE BIG TOP**; Monogram picture and release; director, Karl Brown; Scott R. Dunlap in charge of production; associate producer, William Lackey; screen play by Marion Orth; based on Llewellyn Hughes' original story; photography, Gilbert Warrenton; sound, Karl Zint; musical director, Abe Meyer; film editor, Russell Schoengarth. Cast: Anne Nagel, Marjorie Main, Jack LaRue, Grant Richards, George Cleveland, Herbert Rawlinson, Rolfe Sedan, Betty Compson, Snowflake, Harry Harvey, Charlene Wyatt, Speed Hansen.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

MONOGRAM gives us this time a tale of circus life in which a complication arises when a trapeze artist, a girl whose career has been nurtured by a domineering aunt, proceeds to fall in love. Highlights of the picture are some forceful moments of characterization contributed by Marjorie Main as the steely aunt, owner of the circus, especially one in which she challenges an unruly lion and, chair in hand, forces it into its cage. Considerable color surrounding circus life has been created, a menagerie of animals, trapeze performances and the like featuring in the story. There are a good many stock shots, but they are well matched with the others and are interesting in themselves. The story unfolds smoothly, albeit the latter portion lags in tempo a bit, and the ending is rather summary and arbitrary. Judged by the standards set by the run of independent productions, however, the quality of the picture is generally good, and it should prove a satisfactory dualer.

They Float Through the Air . . .

OF THE players, George Cleveland stands out in his sympathetic portrayal of an old clown. Anne Nagel, as the girl, is easy and pleasant, though she might have made her characterization more vivid. Jack LaRue is efficiently glum as a disappointed lover, and Grant Richards, if somewhat mannered, is satisfactory as the lover. Old timers will be pleased to see Betty Compson and Herbert Rawlinson again, both doing good work. Little Charlene Wyatt plays capably the star performer as a child. Marjorie Main, as I have said, has moments of fine force, thought at other times the script requires her to reveal a tender heart too suddenly and too profusely for conviction. A fault of Marion Orth's screen play is that it permits such abrupt emotional transitions, and also crams story developments into single scenes when such developments need spacing. In his direction Karl Brown's best touches are to be found in the action scenes, as when the circus burns in an early part of the picture. Gilbert Warrenton, photographer, in addition to his ingenious employment of the stock shots, has contrived some effective montage here and there. For some reason the performers in the air have been filmed so that their movements are noticeably slower than they normally would be. This makes the artists appear to float through the air with a little too much of the greatest of ease, tends to simplify their stunts and to slow down the movement of the

story. I do not know the technical problems involved, but if these scenes could be speeded up it would be to the advantage of the picture.

SHANGHAI IS BACKGROUND . . .

● **SHADOWS OVER SHANGHAI**; Fine Arts; producer, Franklyn Warner; associate producer-director, Charles Lamont; assistant director, Ralph Slosser; art director, Ralph Berger; cameraman, Arthur Martinelli; film editor, Bernard Loftus. Cast: James Dunn, Ralph Morgan, Linda Gray, Robert Barrat, Paul Sutton, Edward Woods, Edwin Mordant, Chester Gan, Victor Wong, Edward Keane, Billy Bevan, Wm. Haade, Richard Loo, Victor Young.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

ONE of two initial productions to issue from the newly formed Fine Arts organization, *Shadows Over Shanghai* turns out to be a melodrama with not a little atmosphere and suspense. The story has the advantage of being topical, the plot involving the bombing of Shanghai, and into the yarn has gone a good bit of fictional invention. A young Russian teacher at a mission near Shanghai, is entrusted by her brother with the delivery of an amulet to a party in San Francisco, upon the receipt of which the party will release five million dollars, intended to aid China in the war. The brother has already met with a mishap at the hands of one who knows of his possession of the amulet, having been shot down from the air while flying his plane. The rest of the story recounts the harrowing adventures of the girl and two confidants as they attempt to elude a crafty Japanese army officer on the one hand and an unscrupulous former secret agent of Russia on the other, and to obtain passage from the battle-torn Shanghai. There are evidences of a low production budget in the film, which does not possess the technical finesse of major studio pictures, but nevertheless the oriental atmosphere of Shanghai is sufficiently established, as well as a mood of ominousness.

They Forget Quickly . . .

A BOMBARDMENT scene is truly a booming affair. Many of the shots in the sequence are obviously of the newsreel variety, and some of not very good photographic texture, but they lend excitement. Charles Lamont, director and associate producer, has invested the adventures of his people with the requisite movement and tenseness, and paced well the story as a whole. I have never been able to understand why directors of melodramas so frequently allow their characters to recover almost at once from the effects of shocking incidents, as when the characters here are seen to smile but a moment after a man has been blown to bits in the next room, but maybe I am being finicky. The show is generally well cast. James Dunn's breezy style is applied advantageously to the role of a newspaper cameraman, and Ralph Morgan is excellent as an American participant in the difficulties. Good stock performances are given by Robert Barrat and Paul Sutton, as, respectively, the Russian and the Japanese officer. Linda Gray is adequate as the heroine. The picture as a whole is a standard commercial product of its kind, and is suitable for

the double bills. The original story was by Richard B. Dale, screen-played by Joseph Hoffman.

MOVEMENT IS GOOD . . .

● **ROAD DEMON**; 20th-Fox production; features Henry Arthur, Joan Valerie, Henry Armetta, Tom Beck and Bill Robinson; directed by Otto Brower; associate producer, Jerry Hoffman; original screen play, Robert Ellis and Helen Logan; photography, Edward Snyder; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Boris Leven; film editor, Jack Murray; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Supporting cast: Jonathan Hale, Murray Alper, Edward Marr, Lon Chaney, Jr., Inez Palange, Johnny Pironne, Jr., Eleanor Virzie, Betty Greco.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

SECOND in a series of sports pictures to be produced by Twentieth Century-Fox, *Road Demon* is about as entertaining a film on the subject of motor racing as could be made. Roaring racing cars take over a good deal of footage in the picture, but these sequences are well worked out with respect to suspense and human interest values. Three racers, in the employ of a crooked gambler, have been maneuvering their cars so as to force promising contestants to "kiss the wall." In the final race the son of a racer who has been murdered by one of this outfit, is at the wheel. Robert Ellis and Helen Logan have done a clean job of story telling, events following each other with refreshing directness, and Otto Brower has kept the action brisk, the pace steady, in his direction. It is doubtful if the wrangling in Italian between Gambini and his wife held sufficient humor to justify its interpolation, but movement as a whole is good. The Gambini family, which also made an appearance in the first of the series, provides considerable mirth in the present opus, the man and wife, their activities unknown to each other, selling 120 per cent of shares in the racing car they have been persuaded to buy, and then praying that the car will lose. Not for (Mabel Keefer kindly skip a line) sophisticates, but others will find no little fun and excitement in *Road Demon*.

There Are Two Schools . . .

A NEWCOMER, Henry Arthur, makes his appearance in the sizable part of a brash young driver, and invests the role with sparkle and exuberance. He has a few mannerisms which should be watched before the camera, but his performance as a whole was pleasing. Expert Henry Armetta scored many laughs as Papa Gambini, ably assisted by Inez Palange, playing Mama Gambini. Tom Beck, Joan Valerie and several others are satisfactory in not very demanding parts. Bill Robinson contributes a rhythmic interlude of tap dancing, and young Johnny Pironne, Jr., fingers his accordion with especially good effect this time, in as much as his playing provides background music for a race between two trucks on a highway. This piece of ingenuity led me to hope that the other racing portions would be accompanied by some of the punchy music such as that with which Samuel Kaylin has scored the titles. But only the roaring of engines and the screaming of tires accompany these sequences. I recognize that

there are two schools of thought on the music-vs.-noise issue. One maintains—and I subscribe to this view—that music cannot only add dramatic emphasis to a picture, but also can lend a sensory pleasure to an evening's entertainmet. The other school, among which apparently are many producers, believes that noise is an actual commodity, that people like it so much they pay money at the box-office because they want to hear it. But I fear I will not be convinced of this until lines are forming again in front of theatres.

IS VERY CYNICAL AFFAIR . . .

● **FUGITIVES FOR A NIGHT**; RKO picture and release; features Frank Albertson and Eleanor Lynn; director, Leslie Goodwins; producer, Lou Lusty; screen play, Dalton Trumbo; based on a story by Richard Wormser; musical director, Russell Bennett; photography, Frank Redman; special effects, Vernon L. Walker; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate art director, Howard Campbell; gowns, Renie; sound recording, Earl A. Wolcott; edited by Desmond Marquette. Supporting cast: Allan Lane, Bradley Page, Adrienne Ames, Jonathan Hale, Russell Hicks, Paul Guilfoyle.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

IF YOU are one of those clamoring for the "low down" on Hollywood, *Fugitives for a Night* should contribute to your illumination. It is an oh, oh, so cynical exposé of the inner workings of film-land, in which most of the characters are hard as nails, and all that is loathsome in Hollywood values is flaunted aloft like a dirty shirt. As one cog in the Hollywood machinery, I thought the whole thing a little overdone; the characters and the values do exist in film-land, but not in such concentrated forms. When a picture deals with Hollywood or with any other unusual locality or industrial set-up, we expect the film to treat of its subject in a representative way, and I do not believe *Fugitives for a Night* truthfully reveals the spirit of the film capital and its workers. Anyway, the central character is a stooge, a fellow who is a cross between a court jester and an aid-de-camp to a picture star, keeping his employer out of jams, seeing that he is on the set on time, helping in publicity stunts, and the like.

Has Measure of Validity . . .

SEEMS that this stooge lives a pretty humiliating existence, must hear others say of him as he passes them on the lot, "He's nobody," be snubbed by other players and contemptuously upbraided by studio executives. I have never observed cinema people to be as generally unkind as they are here pictured. Moreover, with some of our fellow countrymen having labored in stinking coal mines for ten hours a day since they were children, and others glad to get a berth on the WPA, I can scarcely conceive the stooge's lot as being so wretched. He dresses well, has a comfortable apartment, and gets invited to swanky parties. The stooge, however, regards his position as such a miserable one, that he buys a greasy-spoon hamburger joint ere the story's close. Be that as it may, there is a measure of validity in the disagreeable aspects of Hollywood which are depicted. Dalton Trumbo has done some witty and

trenchant screen writing in several scenes. Representative quips: "Five thousand people in Hollywood have been ruined because of one part in a picture," and, from a producer, "One slice of ham is as good as another, except that one is fresher than the other."

Yarn Misses Fire . . .

THE weakness of the story, of which Richard Wormser wrote the original, is that, despite its early cynicism, it goes naive with a conventional mystery shooting and then falters about until it is time for a finish, which is effected without much of a climax. For several sequences the boy and girl are shown beating their way to Hollywood from a desert resort, where the shooting occurred, by means of a stolen car, a freight train and such. While they are riding atop the train, under the stars, would seem to be a good time for some philosophizing on some sane values in living, as contrasted with the distorted ones they had found in Hollywood. But nothing of the kind takes place; the two just beat their way from one vehicle to another and squeeze hands a bit. I have a suspicion that some editing might help the concluding portion. Apropos, in an early part the stooge leaves his apartment for a party at his employer's home, and, as the next shot shows the employer, we assume the time is the same night, while it is supposed to be the next morning.

Again the Glass Brick . . .

FRANK ALBERTSON does everything with the part of the stooge that could be done, displaying technical accomplishment and a likeable personality. Eleanor Lynn played with freshness and ease as a young publicity worker, and Allan Lane, Bradley Page and Adrienne Ames are efficient. Jonathan Hale, with skilful use of nuance, makes outstanding his role of a police captain. During moments such as Hale's inquisitorial scene at the desert resort, Director Leslie Goodwin seems to be handling his material in an imaginative and sure way; too bad the film as a whole did not turn out to be better than just fair double-bill timber. A distressing feature of the picture is the appearance of that film executive office set with the glass brick embellishments, which I have seen in several films now. They might at least knock out the glass brick.

NEW FAMILY SERIES . . .

● **THE HIGGINS FAMILY**; a Republic picture; associate producer, Sol C. Siegel; directed by Gus Meins; screen play by Paul Gerard Smith and Jack Townley; original story by Richard English; production manager, Al Wilson; photographed by Jack Marta; supervising editor, Murray Seldeen; film editor, Ernest Nims; art director, John Victor Mackay; musical score by Cy Feuer; costumes by Irene Saltern. Cast: James Gleason, Lucile Gleason, Russell Gleason, Lynn Roberts, Harry Davenport, William Bakewell, Paul Harvey, Wallie Clark, Sally Payne, Richard Tucker, Doreen McKay, Franklin Parker, Gay Seabrook.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

WELCOME to the fold, the latest of the family series, and a worthy newcomer at that. *The Higgins Family* series opens auspiciously with a completely charming insight into the woes and weal of

the Higgins outfit—and what an outfit! Director Gus Meins has woven a neat little picture out of the average daily doings of an average family. There is luckily no attempt to insinuate villainy and dark deeds as we find them in other family series. The plot is motivated by coincidence and circumstance, replete with fresh situations and good dialogue. It is to Director Meins' credit that he never strains for effect, that he lets his camera leisurely tell a leisurely story, and all of it is done in the best of taste.

Story and Dialogue Good . . .

BASED on the original by Richard English, Paul Gerard Smith and Jack Townley have fashioned a nice little yarn which hangs together well, moves swiftly and quietly and is chock-full of novel situations and good dialogue. Some of the gags given Russell Gleason, the mechanical-minded young son of the Higgins family, are priceless. His phone-radio attachment, whereby all phone conversation is amplified through the radio, garnered lots of laughs. And his electric short-circuiting was well-devised business also. The story about the Higginses is simplicity itself. It strikes a common note with the audience because of its very homeliness.

Acting Outstanding . . .

ACTING honors are pretty evenly divided all around. Jimmie Gleason was never better and funnier; and Lucille, his wife, as the better half of the Higgins family, rates top honors too. Harry Davenport, as Grandpa Higgins, the perpetual house guest and *persona non grata*, steals picture honors as well as the picture. He is a wonderful addition to the Higgins combination, a sly, wicked grin in his eyes that makes his role refreshing and interesting. Young Russell Gleason is also part of the Higgins menage as the inventive and somewhat destructive brains of the family. He has all the accomplishment and finesse of his veteran father, shows good camera presence and timing. Lynn Roberts, a newcomer to this reviewer, is a capable young actress who can do weightier roles. She is eye-appealing as well as being a capable little actress. Young William Bakewell has long been a secret favorite here, a young man who deserves good roles and who never seems to get them. Paul Harvey as Thornwald, the irate food company executive, and Wallie Clark as Jimmie's dyspeptic boss, add to the formidableness of the cast. Doreen McKay stands out as a long-suffering librarian in love with Higgins, Jr.

Production Values There . . .

AS THE first of an impending series *The Higgins Family* leaves little to be desired. Here is a wealth of acting talent arrayed, set against a carefully concocted background. This seems to be a kind of object lesson of how to make a good picture under two and one-half million dollars. There is more pathos, more drama, more humor and more plain good cinema here than in some of the picture's more pretentious counterparts. Associate Producer Sol Siegel has given his family series an excellent send-off. Murray Seldeen did a creditable job of editing.

I understand from reliable sources that Warner's Hollywood Theatre demanded a picture on short order and *Higgins* was rushed in about ten minutes after Mr. Seldeen got through winding the theatre print on the last reel spool. It is no condemnation to say, therefore, that the picture is a trifle too long, and action near the end could be curtailed. All of which proves that Director Meins did not shoot from the cuff but gave his picture careful thought. I have been hissed at for saying that the size of a picture budget had nothing to do with its quality. I will let *Higgins* speak for me.

NOTHING NEW IN THIS ONE . . .

● **THE RENEGADE RANGER**; RKO picture and release; starring George O'Brien; director, David Howard; associate producer, Bert Gilroy; screen play by Oliver Drake; based on story by Bennett Cohen; photography, Harry Wild; art director, Van Nest Polglase; associate art director, Lucius Croxton; musical director, Roy Webb; sound recording, Hugh McDowell, Jr; edited by Frederic Knudston. Supporting players: Rita Hayworth, Tim Holt, Ray Whitley, Lucio Villegas, William Royle, Cecilia Callejo, Neal Hart, Monte Montague, Robert Kortman, Charles Stevens, James Mason, Tom London.

Reviewed by Robert Joseph

ORIGINALITY is something the average cinemagoer has begun to expect of Westerns within the recent past. An attempt to bring them up-to-date, infuse them with newness, and give them fresh angles, is clearly discernible in some of the latest horse operas. And if not a certain topicalness at least a little different twist in plot. Basically, Westerns are all the same. It is the twist-difference which enables us to distinguish one from the other. *The Renegade Ranger*, a George O'Brien effort, is not one of these. I have seen this picture a dozen times before. I recognized the characters as they came on the screen. In the present instance this is a pity because this film is nicely mounted and is carefully directed, edited, scored and produced. Standing out is Film Editor Frederic Knudtson's excellent timing and pacing. He had to keep *Rangers* moving and he had to keep the audience interest. This he does well.

Production Values Good . . .

PRODUCER Bert Gilroy has set a lavish hand on this picture. The cast is a large one and the picture resplendent with good riding and acting shots. The backgrounds are good and the sets are designed with taste to the credit of Van Nest Polglase. But I think Gilroy slipped when he passed the present script. It lacks life. Rita Hayworth is a young lady of comely looks and good talent. She deserves a better chance and better roles. For my money, she stands head and shoulder above the dozen or so Western leading ladies I have seen during the last few months. She has good camera presence and has finesse, a quality often lacking in younger players assigned to this kind of role.

The Case of O'Brien . . .

AS I have written before, Mr. O'Brien gave what in my estimation was one of the finest performances I have ever seen in *Sunrise*. It is logical to assume that his acting has improved since that picture was

made by F. W. Murnau over ten years ago. He deserves better roles and better parts, up to the standard of his abilities. Relegated to the corral and hitching post, as he has been for some seasons now, I think he is wasted. It is either a sorry commentary on what Hollywood does to its players by way of burning up their talents or his performance in that film is to the everlasting glory and credit of Murnau's genius. In either case Mr. O'Brien deserves a chance. And I am not his press agent.

MUSIC IN CURRENT PICTURES

By Bruno David Ussher

That Beethoven Film . . .

A WELL informed member of the Warner Brothers organization assures me that this studio has definitely decided to make a *Life of Beethoven*. If not a *Life* it may prove the *Love* or *Loves* of Beethoven. The whole affair, however, may not get under way for another year. There is a script, but from what I understand, it is far from camera-ready and changes galore may be made after a cast has been chosen. The music of course will be Beethoven; however, my informant is not clear on that point. This can be well explained, because the script should determine the choice of the music, but Warners could already lay down a policy of leaving piano music to the piano, and of using only orchestra music for the orchestra. I trust the public will not be treated to a Beethoven film which, in the end, is nothing but a paraphrase on the hackneyed Moonlight Sonata idea in a fashion somewhat of this genre: The slightly deaf master is seen at a piano, wiping away furtive tears. Outside, boy meets girl; more boys meet more girls and their gayety breaks into the sombre music. Alas, the composer no longer hears them or himself. Of course he sees them and so his curly head falls forward on the music rack while someone plays a crashing discord. His shoulders shake convulsively. At that moment in walks a beautiful young woman, etc. The orchestra in the no-man's land of the recording stage strikes up the Moonlight Sonata. At this time, if he has not done so already during the preview, a certain executive turns the sound on to full fury.

Making History Fit . . .

AS MY writer friend from Warners remarked: "We shall make history fit; leave that to us. We shall fit it to suit the front office, to suit Mr. Muni, and if there is room left for more fitting, we shall try to please also Leo Forbstein and the other guys from the music department. If you can fit the life of Zola, surely you can fit the life of Beethoven." He laughed. "After all," he continued, "do the historians agree regarding the life of Beethoven?" I told him that there was little discrepancy to be found among the major biographies dealing with Beethoven. He seemed unperturbed. "What if they do? How many people do? I see that Goldwyn has a lot of difficulties in finding the kind of story Jascha Heifetz will

approve. After all, what is the matter with Heifetz? All he has to do is to play the fiddle and be himself. He may be able to do the first. He may find it hard to do the other. These musicians. Ya! Who knows how many affairs Beethoven had until Cosima finally led him up the aisle?" I must have looked rather mystified. He amplified, "You see, we could bring in Liszt playing one of Beethoven's sonatas, perhaps the Moonlight Sonata, while Beethoven clasps Cosima, the daughter of Liszt." At which point I looked at my watch and told him that I had to rush to the office. "By the way," I added to my adieux, "your suggestion of making history fit; that's an idea, because it was Wagner who married Cosima. Cosima was not born yet when Beethoven died."

Four Sisters Scream . . .

THOSE Four Sisters and their flute-swinging papa are noisier even than the whole horde of children in the *Constant Nymph*. Two things are wrong in the Warner's film which contains such a sparkling score by Max Steiner. The people in the dubbing room, either because they have been ordered, or because of deplorable hardening of their ear drums, have failed to observe proper relationship between dialogue and music. Especially when dialogue is so fast and coming often from half a dozen and more persons, this conflict between loud talk and music is trying. Worse yet, that hand (in the Warner Brothers Theatre) which rocks indeed the cradle of sound, was a hefty one at the preview. Nevertheless, compliments to the veteran composer of the films. Steiner not only provides a gay, spontaneous flowing and bubbling score of fine Scherzo quality, but he has managed to fit in most naturally Schubert's Serenade, and the Haide Roeschen, as well as Mendelssohn's Wings of Song. It seems to me as if Steiner were developing a new and clever technic, whereby he employs famous classics in an organically music-dramatic manner. He adds some amusing touches when those modern daughters of a musician give sweet old Schubert a shot of "hotcha", just to annoy their old man, the Beethoven-minded papa.

Paging the Band . . .

WHATEVER the underlying purpose of the "front office" when featuring a band in *Garden of the Moon*, they could hardly have done better, because both legitimate and trick playings of this band, headed by Ray Mayer, Joe Venuti and Jerry Colonna, are musically and otherwise most entertaining. Ray Heindorf and Frank Perkins have proven anew their ingenuity as orchestrators. And the recording is remarkably good, especially in those scenes when crowd

noises and finally the popping of dozens of balloons is mixed with the band music. The scene when the orchestra men outblare the unwanted singer is well managed in that sense, as well as John Payne's decidedly enjoyable demonstration as a singing band leader. Tunes and lyrics by Harry Warren, Al Dubin and Johnny Mercer have spirit, appeal and a general naturalness, both as to melodies, rhythms and verses.

Iturbi Walks Out . . .

JOSE ITURBI, who was to have played the piano and conducted in MGM'S *Sweethearts*, discovered such a lack of affection for the role he was to play that he absented himself for good from the Culver City studio. I am not surprised. Why should Iturbi appear at all in a picture made for the vocal glorification of Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald? He is too big an artist to play third fiddle, although his alleged demands for more close-ups, if true, must sound childish, though not more infantile than a lot of demonstrations by camera celebrities. Financially, too, it seems unnecessary to put an Iturbi into a production already starring the two singers. Some day, I am sure, Iturbi will return to the sound-film stage, provided there is a story and a part worthy of his faculties. But I hope he will do more playing than playing and conducting simultaneously. I know he is fond of demonstrating that both can be done at once, and perhaps the sound-film stage, where so many trial recordings can be made until all sounds well, is a better place for repeating this historic stunt than the concert stage.

Chaliapin Himself . . .

TO ANYONE who had known the Fjedor Chaliapin, the *Don Quixote* film now being shown must have some merits. It is like looking through yellowed programs or old letters, for they bring back the living memory of voices and gestures, of certain inflections of tone and facial expressions. From that standpoint the English-made Chaliapin film serves as a bridge of time. As a resume of the Cervantes story it is a poor undertaking. Even as an excerpt it will not do. A few scenes are stitched together, but there is little of the original atmosphere. True, there are some fine bits of camera work. However, the Russian accent of the great basso, softened seemingly by a French teacher of English, and the broad Cockney jargon of Robey as Sancho Pansa, are quite disillusioning. The recording of Chaliapin's voice and of Ibert's score, based in part on music by Darkomiszky, sounded so inadequate that I left before the end of the film.

Eyes Examined and Glasses Fitted

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JOE KANE

Director

“Billy The Kid Returns”

for Republic



Hollywood

20 CENTS

SPECTATOR

Every Other Week

Edited by WELFORD BEATON

Thirteenth Year

Los Angeles, California—October 1, 1938

Vol. 13—No. 18

Guild Victory Over Producers Essential
To Well Being of Pictures

Norman Reilly Raine Tilts His Lance At
Some of Editor's Opinions

Film Industry Is Learning It Cannot Be
Run Successfully by Politicians

When Sound Came to the Screen It Made
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Motion Pictures Could Be Your Best Entertainment

John Payne

Current Release

"Garden of the Moon"

Management

WALTER BATCHELER

PARAMOUNT had him under contract for a couple of years, but apparently could see nothing in him; Warners took him over, gave him a big part in *Garden of the Moon*—and another star is born. John Payne has everything—youth, good looks, intelligence, agreeable singing voice, attractive personality and the knack of making a lounge suit look as formal as a dress suit and a dress suit appear to be as comfortable as a lounge suit. . . . Payne is no flash in the pan. He does not smile and sing his way through *Garden of the Moon*. He works his passage in a part that calls for a wide assortment of emotional reaction, and he is equal to every demand.—WELFORD BEATON, *Hollywood Spectator*.

John Beal

Recently Completed:

"I Am The Law"—Columbia

"Arkansas Traveler"—Paramount

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Wm. Morris Agency

Present Engagement:

"SOLILOQUY" a new
Play Now in Rehearsal
For West Coast Opening
Prior to New York.



From the EDITOR'S EASY CHAIR

OBVIOUSLY only a united front by the screen's creative workers will overcome the united efforts of the producers to block the institution of reforms which the Guilds champion and which pictures need. Supporting the Guilds' contentions is the basic fact that the producers have made a mess of their jobs, a mess they now are trying to clear up in the silliest possible manner: by spending one million dollars at the outer edge of the audience discontent their product has created, instead of putting more brains into the product itself, thus attacking the cause of the discontent at its source.

To the same extent that picture making is a business are its creative workers business men. Each of them is in business for himself, and only to the extent that the whole business succeeds can he be financially successful as a part of it. Directors, actors and writers realize this. To protect themselves, to insure their future, they have formed themselves into Guilds to guard their interests.

Every forward step the Guilds have taken has been resisted stubbornly by the tightly knit producer organization. If the producers prevail, if discontent prevails in the ranks of creative workers, it will mean more discontent among those who pay to see the pictures, for dissatisfied creative workers cannot create satisfying screen entertainment.

A just man has no honest reason for refusing to bargain with another equally just. Only a man who wants the best of a bargain has a motive for refusing to bargain with one who is motivated by the conviction that his demands are fair and reasonable, and who is strong enough to insist that he be treated fairly.

Present box-office conditions demonstrate that the stability of the film industry will be imperiled

if its fate be left solely in the hands of those who almost have wrecked it. The things for which the Guilds stand are things the welfare of the film industry needs. The Spectator can see nothing in the Guild demands from which producers would not profit by granting.

Discontent of exhibitors, legal action by the government, the plight of the box-office are products of the producers' way of doing things. What right have these unwise men to challenge the wisdom of Guild demands? If they had picture wisdom, their pictures would reveal it and there would be no discontent, no legal action, no box-office slump.

The Guilds should maintain a united front until they have gained all their objectives. And if the producers were sensible they would grant all just Guild demands on the theory that pictures which will make audiences contented cannot be

ON THE ROAD TO MAKE FILMS PAY

By Mabel Keefer

By the old Pacific Ocean, lookin', eastward longingly,
There's an industry a-settin', and I know it thinks o' me;
For the films are in the doldrums, and the movie-bells they say:
"Come you back, you Movie Patron; come you back and make films pay!"

*Come you back and make films pay,
You have been too long away:
Can't you 'ear the dollars chunkin' as we plan this grand
soiree?
On the road to make films pay,
Where the movie-fishes play,
An' the sound comes up like thunder from the sound-track
'crost the way.*

Ship me to some movie playhouse, where the best is all there is,
Where there aren't no class B pictures, and every one's a whiz;
Then the movie-bells will call me, an' it's there that I will be—
In the good old movie theatre, enjoyin' all I see!

*On the road to make films pay,
Where nobody can gainsay
Movies are good entertainment if they certain laws obey!
On the road to make films pay,
Where the movie stars all play,
An' there isn't no sound like thunder when they sing a
roundelay!*

made by writers, directors and actor who are discontented.

To qualify as competent to pass judgment on the Guilds' contentions regarding the manner in which the motion picture industry should be conducted, the producers should demonstrate their ability to make the kind of pictures that will attract the audiences without a million-dollar coaxing campaign.

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WE TAKE A LOOK AT JITTERBUGGING . . .

WHEN they begin to jitter to music, when jitterbugs infest all parts of the country and the film industry is about to sprinkle some pictures with them, it appeared to me that the situation had become so desperate that I should do something about it. Previously I had dismissed jitterbugging with a line in *Mental Meanderings*, but that was before I encountered Tom Gallery and was invited by him to attend his jitterbug contest at the Hollywood Legion Stadium last Sunday evening. I accepted the invitation after I had spent the day in wearing down Mrs. Spectator's resistance to the point of finally persuading her to go with me. We had a whale of a time, even though I was not as successful in my efforts to get Mrs. Spectator to leave before it was over as I was in getting her to go. The first thing which impressed me was that at last I had discovered something even noisier than the average talkie. The orchestra's playing and the crowd's cheering vied with one another for top deafening honors, and ended about even. An interesting feature of the goings-on was the manner in which the male bugs turned their partners upsidedown and waved their legs in the air; but I noticed that the most applause was given the couples who kept their four feet on the floor. Apparently girls' legs no longer are your best entertainment. Jitterbugging, I concluded, is merely a social manifestation, athletically insane and too violent to last. But while it lasts I would advise you to take a look at it. But don't try it. We did. When we got home we turned on the radio and jittered, but after almost a minute of it we decided it was not for two people who have been married for thirty years.

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RAINE TILTS HIS LANCE . . .

DEAR Welford:

In your current issue you comment on the use of color in pictures, treating with whimsical amusement the fact that producers have the "hallucination" that color photography adds box-office value to a picture. You say, in support of your view, that an elementary rule of all the arts is that there must not be in any art creation an element which isolates itself and draws attention to itself at the expense of the creation as a whole. This may be true; but for you to hold that color in a motion picture violates this rule betrays faulty reasoning. A motion picture is a depiction of nature—and nature is color; therefore, by

the ability to add color we approximate that which we are imitating much more truly than by the use of black and white. Color does add, materially, to audience interest in a picture. Your defective logic arises, I think, in the fact that you assume color still to be a novelty whose newness diverts the audience attention from the story. You should know that that is no longer true. The same faulty reasoning which causes you to condemn dialogue in motion pictures, can be answered similarly—that dialogue adds to the naturalness of people moving, living, walking. Motion pictures are not, as you assume, a separate art; they are an imitation of real life; and the closer we get to real life the more successful the imitation is.

Norman Looks At Pictures . . .

TO BE entirely logical you would have to condemn color on the stage and dialogue behind the footlights—for what are motion pictures, but a medium for presenting life to audiences precisely as stage plays attempt to do? The difference, ultimately, lies only in this—that motion pictures are enabled to present starring casts simultaneously all over the world. Up to the invention of a means of projecting dialogue, and now color, they were but a pale substitute for life and for stage productions. Now they take their place ahead of stage productions as more nearly, more factually, representative of life. The introduction of the third dimension will be another important step forward. Will you condemn that, too, because it diverts audience interest? In the same vein, you say that *if* the audience is conscious of color as an *isolated* contribution to a picture, it attracts attention at the expense of the story; if the audience is not conscious of it, if the story is strong enough to hold the attention of the audience, as it must be, to be a box-office success, the money spent in color is wasted. If this latter, and to me, ridiculous, assumption were true, then what a lot of money has been wasted by all the great artists of history, whose stories in color embellish the world's great art galleries. Why didn't the poor deluded souls tell their stories in black and white, instead of confusing and distracting their viewers from the story by going to the unnecessary expense of using color?. Yours for a common-sense and up-to-date viewpoint . . . and with kind personal regards, of course.

—NORMAN REILLY RAINE.

Now It Is Our Turn . . .

BEFORE the screen's surrender to the microphone became complete, Hollywood had begun to look for its writers among those who had achieved success in expressing themselves in the language of literature. As motion picture production had become merely a matter of photographing stories or plays, it was logical for producers to employ authors and playwrights to provide them with story material. Many brilliant writers, therefore, came to Hollywood. Many of them have done brilliant work for the screen. The great improvement talkies have made in the last two or three years is a tribute to the excellent workmanship of those who wrote the

scripts. Among the recruits from the field of literature is my friend, Norman Reilly Raine, an author with a national reputation in the world of fiction. Since coming to Hollywood he has mastered the technique of talkie writing, has developed enthusiasm for his work, and has turned out some excellently constructed scripts. As talkies are not screen art, Norman has had no occasion to occupy his mind with the nature of the art, its demands or its limitations, contenting himself with doing the jobs assigned to him and giving his employers what they wanted, as with varying degrees of success have the other authors and playwrights whom the picture studios have brought to Hollywood.

Mission of All Arts . . .

WHILE I do not criticize Norman for his failure to study an art form which Hollywood abandoned when it went over wholly to the photographing of stage technique, I challenge his right to discuss it, a right, his letter discloses, he is not qualified to exercise. Only Daniels should come to judgment. He does not qualify his expressions with even a single, "In my opinion;" he makes the flat statement, "motion pictures are not, as you assume, a separate art; they are an imitation of real life." No art is an imitation of real life. It is the mission of all arts to interpret life within the terms of their respective limitations. I do not "assume" that the screen is a separate art. It is a fact established by the various perfect examples of the art we had when pictures were silent, when there was such an art in Hollywood. That was a long time before Norman came to us. If he had come earlier, if he had written even one *motion picture*, he would know that the screen is the greatest of all the arts, that it is the one art which laughs at the frames within which all others must express themselves. "You assume color still to be a novelty," he writes, thus revealing that he has not taken the trouble to find out what I do assume. As a matter of fact, I have no "assumptions" about screen art; I have convictions born of a score of years of observation and study of the screen as a medium of entertainment.

Box-Office First Consideration . . .

ONE of my convictions is that the sole mission of Hollywood producers is to regard motion pictures as a business, and to conduct the business in a manner to make it earn the largest profit. I regard the *Hollywood Spectator* as a paper as wholly commercial as the *Wall Street Journal*. The box-office is the beacon by which the *Spectator* steers its course. When color was a novelty with box-office value, the *Spectator* applauded its use, urged its adoption by all the studios; but at the same time it warned that when the novelty wore off, color would not add anything to the box-office value of a picture because it is not a legitimate element of screen art. Screen art is the foundation upon which the whole Hollywood structure rests. Liberties can be taken with the upper floors from time to time; the use of the color and the telling of stories in dialogue were all right in their

day, but when they strained the foundation too much, when they, like Norman, denied the existence of the foundation, the whole structure began to wobble and has been wobbling ever since.

Functions of Screen Art . . .

WE WILL consider another of Norman's pronouncements: "Dialogue adds to the naturalness of people moving, living, walking." What people? I never have seen any people on the screen, nor any movement. I have seen photographs which gave me the *illusion* that I was seeing people, an illusion heightened by the rapid projection of still photographs on the screen to create, by the persistence of vision, the illusion that I was looking at real movement. The screen is the greatest of all the arts because it is the most intangible, because it has no body or substance, because it is wholly an *illusion*, so deftly presented that it becomes easy for our imaginations to entertain ourselves with it by supplying everything it lacks—color, depth, voices, movement. Audible dialogue poisons screen art, but, as the *Spectator* has maintained since the coming of sound, it is all right to administer the poison in small doses to expedite the telling of stories, for in a business whose customers have shown a willingness to accept less than perfection, it would be unwise to make an extra and expensive effort to achieve perfection. But at no time is it permissible to put on the screen anything that can be left to the imagination of the audience. The degree of enjoyment one derives from viewing a motion picture is the degree in which the picture exercises his imagination and gives his intellect a rest. The true motion picture appeals only to the imagination; the talkie appeals to the intellect, thus the motion picture is universal entertainment and the talkie is not. Color photography violates the first rule of screen art by denying the imagination the privilege of painting the picture in the colors which please it most.

If Third Dimension Comes . . .

MOST of Norman's arguments are so absurd that if I disputed them in detail I would have to apologize to my readers. An example: "To be entirely logical you would have to condemn color and dialogue on the stage." He asks me if I would condemn a third dimension as a screen element. If the third dimension should come before the film industry has its sanity restored in the matter of color and audible dialogue—in fact, if the third dimension comes at all—the screen, by dissipating the illusive quality which is its strength and denying our imaginations the privilege of entertaining ourselves with what we see on the screen, then the industry, instead of spending one million dollars once in a lifetime to drum up trade, will have to spend twice that sum every year and then will not get the audiences it needs to sustain it. And if it were not boasting, I would inform my friend Norman that people who have read the *Spectator* for years can tell him that during the years I have revealed a weakness for mak-

ing predictions and that thus far my batting average is 1000%.

Why the Box-Office Slump? . . .

BUT let us assume that Norman is right in everything he claims, that color belongs on the screen, that telling stories completely in dialogue is the best way to tell them; that, in short, I am almost as batty as he dubs me and that no fault can be found with things as they are—for that must be Norman's meaning if what he writes me has meaning. To be consistent with the *Spectator's* status as a strictly business paper, let us take Norman's thoughts as signifying his complete satisfaction with the present product the film industry is turning out. That would mean, if he be right, that the box-office must be flourishing, that the film business must be booming, that the public must be accepting wholeheartedly what is offered it. If the reverse conditions exist—as I predicted six or seven years ago, they would—it would seem to give me the edge on the argument. The film industry is spending one million dollars in a frantic attempt to drive people into film theatres to keep the ushers from being lonely. Why? Will Norman please tell me? . . . Across the room from my chair hangs an etching autographed to me by the artist. I like it. In monotone it shows a horse and buggy in front of a farm house, beyond it a field of grain, then a row of trees. It is a fine example of the etcher's art. But looking at it through Norman's eyes I see its weakness. The trees should be green, the grain yellow, and there should be mechanical gadgets to permit the horse to swish its tail and snort. . . . But Norman is a good scout and a clever writer. When Hollywood gets back to its business of making motion pictures, he soon will grasp their requirements and hand in brilliantly written scripts.

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PICTURES AND THEIR PEOPLE . . .

TWO of those the *Spectator* rated as poor entertainment, *Marie Antoinette* and *Spawn of the North*, are doing very well at the box-office even though many reviewers treated them much the same as I did. . . . The papers have it that Jack Mulhall has been given an important part. He never should have been given any other kind. . . . Ralph Graves is another who should be given a break. . . . How the public would go for an anti-war picture if one were showing now. Hollywood refuses to make one because foreign countries might not like it. This country alone would return enormous profits on such a picture. . . . As a recruit from the stage, Walter Kingsford is not running true to form; he likes Hollywood, sings its praises, would rather be idle here than busy on Broadway. Encountered him at a Valley market where both of us were thumbing melons; he was dressed in shorts and a rich brown tan. "Imagine this outfit on Broadway," he said. . . . Buddy Ebsen and Sterling Holloway, as a team in big pictures, would prove a box-office sensation. . . . And with Una Merkel and Joan Davis contributing two brands of feminine comedy, a series of such pictures would

be a series of riots. . . . The name part in *Dulcy* is tailored exactly to Una's measure. . . . Jitterbug pictures being contemplated now would be out of date before they could be shown. Jitterbugging is too violent to live long. . . . One of the most brilliant minds I have encountered is that of John Burton, actor. . . . Met Lloyd C. Douglas at a dinner party given by Jaime Jalmer at her home. Author Douglas has been represented on the screen by three of his great stories, *The Green Light*, *Magnificent Obsession*, *White Banners*. A fine, companionable fellow with a charming wife; now residing here. . . . Myrna Loy and Clark Gable should not be co-starred again; have made love to one another so often that with the public they have the status of an old married couple; each should be given a new mate. . . . If Harry Cohn could have realized what a prize package he had in John Brahm, that director would be given only big, class A pictures to make. . . . At a preview I caught the tail end of a picture in which Pierre Watkin, playing an attorney for the defense, addresses a jury on behalf of his client; he makes it the finest scene of the sort I have seen in any picture. . . . In the same picture Gloria Stuart has her hair pushed up to the top of her head to conform to the latest feminine fancy; she looks a fright. . . . George Cohan's asking \$500,000 for appearance in a picture depicting his life is one way of showing emphatically that he wants to keep off the screen, but it would not be surprising if some company proved insane enough to pay it, despite the fact that the Cohan name has not two-bits' worth of box-office value.

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POLITICS AND PICTURE POLICY . . .

WHEN the overlords of the motion picture realm some years ago began to fear that public prying might poke holes in the bonds which united them in a tight trust, they erected a buffer to absorb the pokes and keep them from getting through to the main structure. In the name of self-regulation they organized the Motion Picture Producers' and Distributors' Association and offered it as a holy gesture to guard both the standard of pictures and the interests of those who paid to see them. One would think their first concern would have been to entrust the welfare of the association to a person familiar with film production and distribution, but instead they entrusted it to a man who knew nothing about pictures but a lot about politics and Presbyterianism—Will Hays. And Will, apparently deeming a knowledge of pictures unessential to the conduct of his organization, chose as his lieutenant, in the person of Carl Millikan, a politician who was governor of Maine and a churchman with high rating as a Protestant layman. To please the Catholics he added Joe Breen to his staff, but Joe unexpectedly turned out to be the noblest Roman of them all by developing a real sense of picture values and courage enough to enforce his demand for their recognition. In an effort to please the powerful National Association of Women's Clubs he displayed it by placing on his staff its

former president, Mrs. Ella Winters. He cast Charles Pettijohn in the role of political roustabout, a role he had spent long years in learning how to play.

Had to Have Protection . . .

THE automobile industry has a central organization which is composed solely of people who know the automobile business, and the steel industry has a similar body composed of steel experts. So it is with all the country's main industries. Why, then, is the film industry the only one which has a governing body composed solely of people without prior experience in the making or selling of motion pictures? The answer is that the film industry is the only one, since the Sherman anti-trust law was passed, that knew it was vulnerable under the restrictions of that law and therefore depended for existence upon the protection it could build for itself. If the producers' organization had been composed solely of people with picture knowledge and whose single concern was the healthy, legitimate growth of the industry, there could have been reared a structure which today would not be in process of demolition by the Department of Justice. Even above the odor of his own ego and dictator complex, Franklin Roosevelt caught the smell of the film industry's trade practices and declared they "stink to heaven."

Respectability Under Pressure . . .

QUITE consistent with their policy of keeping a weather eye open for favorable influence breezes, the major producers united in making the *Motion Picture Herald* the industry's chief trade journal, ever mindful of the fact that its owner, Martin Quigley, stands high in Catholic layman ranks. Quigley is an able publisher and has made the *Herald* an excellent paper. But he has my sympathy. From his occasional writings I get the impression that he chafes under the obligations the advertising patronage of the producers places upon him, that he would like to speak right out and tell how rotten he thinks things are. Even though Terry Ramsaye, the *Herald's* editor, always seemingly is concerned much more with his literary style than with the thought he tries to express with it, now and then through a chink in the verbal foliage which obscures his meaning and makes reading him a sporting proposition in that his ideas escape the hunter more often than they are caught, there comes a suggestion of a rebellious spirit yearning to express itself freely and frankly. . . . But everything the film industry has done to give it the appearance of respectability has failed to hit the mark aimed at. Now it is in process of having respectability forced upon it.

* * *

WHAT WOULD YOU KNOW? . . .

WHILE hustling along the Boulevard the other day I encountered my old friend, Eugene Roth, whom I knew up north when Hollywood was an orchard. He now is managing director of the International Research Library, a Hollywood institution. I asked him what it was, and he took me to his office and

showed me. It is a most astonishing thing, one which should solve all the research problems of all the picture studios. I could not grasp the sweep of it until Gene reduced it to statistics; then I realized that it embraces the sum total of man's thought and accomplishments. It includes 144,751 articles and books in its library file dealing exhaustively with that many subjects. It can tell you about the state of the papyrus industry in 3850 B. C. and the music of Irving Berlin; about the squirrels and children in City Park, Mobile, Alabama, in 1860, and fireplaces and ovens from the cave man era until today; it will provide you with full information about women's garters and the cathedrals of the world. I did not ask Gene, but I am confident that if it cannot tell you who killed Cock Robin, it at least can tell you at whom the finger of suspicion pointed at the time the noted crime was committed. It contains no less than 4,527,686 pictures, prints, clippings, photos and research material items, and 490,000 pounds of library materials, the result of the genius of artists, writers, photographers, printers and publishers of all time. Hamilton Grayson and Winifred Rosser have spent a lifetime assembling the extraordinary mass of material which soon will be available to Hollywood picture makers.

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WHEN LAZINESS CAME TO HOLLYWOOD . . .

WHEN the microphone came to Hollywood to disturb the serenity of the silent art which was being developed to the point of perfection, it brought with it a temptation to directors and writers to become lazy. It was so easy to write a love scene for the microphone—"Boy says to girl, 'I love you.'"—so easy to direct it, there seemed to be no reason why mental effort should be resorted to in striving to design a scene for the camera to record. The laziness virus spread through the veins of producers, writers and directors until the spoken word became the screen's chief medium of expression, and the duty of the camera became one of photographing people talking to one another. Screen entertainment had made for itself such a firmly fixed place among the diversions of the public, it took seven or eight years for the picture-going habit to weaken under the barrage of dialogue; but it finally weakened, and in an effort to restore its strength the film industry is spending one million dollars to make the patient think he has no reason for being weak.

How Clarence Brown Did It . . .

WHILE the exploitation departments of the producing organizations are making motions which will prove futile, Hollywood could help things along by injecting some silent virus in the veins of the pictures it is making now. I concede that it takes more brains to write for the camera than to write for the microphone, but the talkie era has given screen writers such a long mental rest, they should by this time be equal to the task of writing pictures instead of dialogue. As a mark to shoot at, I recommend some scenes I can re-run today on my mental screen even though it must be all of ten years since I saw them

in the picture of which they were a part. The picture, *Flesh and the Devil*; the stars, Greta Garbo and Jack Gilbert; the director, Clarence Brown. Gilbert and Garbo are in love, and Marc McDermott, Garbo's husband, finds the lovers in a compromising position. A quarrel follows; an exchange of cards registers there will be a duel. Next we see the duelling ground, a hilltop against a sky highlighted by the rising sun. The camera stands a long way off, and when the combatants and their seconds arrive, we see them only as little figures, black against the vivid background. The seconds disappear down the up-stage slope of the hill; the combatants stand back-to-back; a third figure drops a handkerchief as a signal, then disappears; the combatants walk away from one another to get the right distance apart—and walk out of the scene, one on each side of the screen, leaving it without a person in sight. Next we see a puff of smoke on the right and on the left of the screen, then the seconds as they run up from the far side of the hill and come into view, little figures a long way off. We see them separate into two groups, one of which runs off-stage right, the other off-stage left; fade-out, leaving a bare screen. Who was the victor in the duel? Fade in on Garbo trying on a widow's hat in a stylish shop; on her lips is a faint smile of satisfaction. (I had intended writing the duel sequence as it would appear in a talkie of today, but at the mere thought of it I burst out crying and could not go on.)

* * *

"THE OLD, OLD QUESTION" . . .

OUR thanks to Rob Wagner for the following, which appeared under the above heading in a recent issue of his always interesting and clever *Script*: "Another thing we came back to was a slump in cinema box-office returns accompanied by a terrific wonderment as to what is the matter with motion pictures, and a million-dollar campaign to buy 'em an oxygen tent. All of which seems queer when for years Welford Beaton has been answering that question in his *Hollywood Spectator* in the best English since Chaucer. We also learned that the slump in picture attendance, curiously enough, synchronized with Movieland's sudden passion for horses, that they've all gone in for raising horses, racing horses, or at least betting on horses. We'll look into this and see if there is any connection."

* * *

ANOTHER STAR ON THE WAY . . .

A YOUNG woman whose name will be famous in the not too distant future is Ellen Morgan, a seventeen-year-old miss, who, without any previous stage or screen experience, carried with extraordinary conviction the long and exacting role of Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. The place, Las Palmas Theatre; the occasion, another week in the Drama Festival being presented at the little theatre by El Capitan College of the Theatre, the institution which Henry Duffy, Mrs. Duffy (Dale Winter), and associates are making such an important recruiting ground for screen and stage talent. The Nora role

is an arduous one; there is only one scene in the play in which Nora does not appear and in which she is not the important character. Emotionally the part runs the scale from frolicking with her children to leaving both husband and home. The way this young girl develops the possibilities of each of her scenes is astonishing and is a tribute to the proficiency of the faculty of the school in which she is being trained. Ellen has the physical beauty which is a screen asset and the feeling and intelligence of which screen and stage stars are made. Duffy pupils were cast in all the *Doll's House* parts, and provided an evening of most interesting entertainment. The one setting to which the action is confined was a fine example of stage designing by Max Ree, who made many artistic contributions to motion pictures and is now a member of the Duffy faculty.

* * *

MENTAL MEANDERINGS . . .

AN ORDINARY sweet potato which Mrs. Spectator placed in a vase and kept supplied with water, now has a graceful vine clinging to slender sticks four feet high. Europe's sweet potato, Herr Hitler, seems to be extending himself almost as rapidly. It will be interesting to see if his sticks will continue to carry the load. . . . I have become a croquet enthusiast; K. C. B. spent six months developing a croquet ground, then lured me into playing with him and now is depriving me of the privilege of spending my small change in a manner that would bring me something I could bring home and eat. . . . Up in Seattle a few months ago, I called on my boyhood friend, Dave Thomson, which, perhaps, is an undignified way to designate Dean David Thomson of the University of Washington; but, anyway, I called on Dave, told him the ingredients of my pipe tobacco mixture, and later he wrote me that I had too great a proportion of 79 Mixture to the amount of Heine's Mixture. I have been trying it his way, and like it better. . . . In the change you get when you pay your check at a Brown Derby restaurant you find the dollar bills are spotlessly new. Like everything else the restaurants serve, I suppose Bob Cobb buys his dollar bills fresh every day. . . . I think our ducks have developed affection for me; the five of them, Sophie, Manchester, Mrs. Bromleigh, Mr. Stuyvesant and George, just came in a solemn, tail-twitching procession around the corner of the house and have squatted near the chair in which I write. Mrs. Bromleigh, beautifully marked and tamest of the lot, is my favorite. I hope when she grows up her fine qualities will be inherited by an egg. . . . I like marketing, but at the cashier's desk do not like to get behind a woman shopper who waits until her purchases are totaled before she takes her handbag off her arm, opens it, fishes around for her purse, opens it, and then fishes for one coin at a time, quite oblivious to the fact that a number of shoppers are waiting for her to get out of the way. . . . One of the finest ceilings to be seen anywhere is that of the drawing room in Winnie Sheehan's home. He brought it from Europe and had the ar-

chitect design the room to accommodate it. . . . One of my favorite bits of music is *Good Night, Sweetheart*. . . . Had two or three other observations to make here, but it occurs to me what an appropriate exit line that last one is; so, good night, sweethearts!

SOME LATE PREVIEWS

ANOTHER FRANK LLOYD TRIUMPH . . .

● **IF I WERE KING**; Paramount picture and release; stars Ronald Colman; produced and directed by Frank Lloyd; associate producer, Lou Smith; screen play by Preston Sturges; based on the play by Justin Huntly McCarthy; photographed by Theodor Sparkuhl; art direction by Hans Dreier and John Goodman; edited by Hugh Bennett; sound recording, Harold C. Lewis and John Cope; interior decorations, A. E. Freudenman; special photographic effects, Gordon Jennings; costumes, Edith Head; musical direction, Boris Morros; musical score by Richard Hageman. Supporting players: Basil Rathbone, Frances Dee, Ellen Drew, C. V. France, Henry Wilcoxon, Heather Thatcher, Stanley Ridges, Bruce Lester, Walter Kingsford, Alma Lloyd, Sidney Toler, Colin Tapley, Ralph Forbes, John Miljan, William Haade, Adrian Morris, Montagu Love, Lester Matthews, William Farnum, Paul Harvey, Barry Maccollum, May Beatty, Winter Hall, Francis McDonald, Ann Evers, Jean Fenwick. Running time, 100 minutes.

DEPENDABLE Frank Lloyd has come through with another to gladden the hearts of exhibitors. *If I Were King* is excellent entertainment primarily because it is one of the finest examples of talkie technique Hollywood has turned out. There is not too much dialogue, and what there is is spoken in tones to match the moods of scenes. Even tempo is maintained throughout, the visual telling of the story being smooth and consistent. Producer-Director Lloyd did not over-build the production until the story was engulfed in massive sets and masses of people, as Metro did with *Marie Antoinette*. In *If I Were King* the story has the right of way, and to that fact is due primarily the audience appeal which will make the picture a tremendous box-office success. It is a strong argument in favor of unit production, the only system which permits a screen creation to be the expression of one mind, as every art creation must be to be worthy of the art to which it belongs. Many people make outstanding contributions to this picture, but as a whole, it expresses the mind of Frank Lloyd. His direction throughout is that of a master.

Brilliant Screen Writing . . .

THE screen play of Preston Sturges is one of the most brilliant examples of screen writing ever handed a director. It is a far cry from the glitter of the court of a French Louis to the gloom of the slums of the French capital, and the characters which inhabit both represent the opposite poles of the social scale, but Sturges handles both with equal authority. Lloyd's direction emphasizes the contrast by the vividness of the characterizations which he develops. The story of Francois Villon is sure-fire box-office, but not unless its potentialities are realized in the script, direction and acting. Sturges's dialogue has box-office value on its own account, many of the

lines having marked literary beauty. It is rather an odd coincidence that in the mails on the way to its subscribers when I was viewing the picture, was the last *Spectator* in which I had this to say: "As long as pictures are composed so largely of dialogue, it might be a good idea now and then to treat the audience to a beautifully worded speech, one which, by developing the charm which words can have, if given to a character who logically could read it would have distinct entertainment value." In *If I Were King* there are a dozen such speeches as I had in mind, and that they have entertainment value will be demonstrated by the success the picture will achieve.

Ronald Colman's Great Performance . . .

NEVER before in his long and successful screen career did Ronald Colman present us with a more brilliant performance than that of his Francois Villon in this picture. He brings out the intellectual side of the strange character to a greater degree than it was developed by others who have played the part, realizing beautifully all the literary values of the poetic speeches Sturges provided. But no less impressive is Ronnie in his swashbuckling interludes and romantic moments. The story is his from the first, revolves around him and fastens our attention on him, and never for a moment does he let us down. Always a strong box-office favorite, this picture will strengthen the demand for him, make him more than ever a favorite. Opposite him in *If I Were King* is the lovely and charming Frances Dee whom we do not see as often as we would wish. Mrs. Joel McCrea should not be so stingy with the graciousness of Frances Dee whose presence in *If I Were King* gives its romance dignity and charm. Ellen Drew, with very little previous experience before the camera, comes through with a dramatic performance which an experienced actress might envy. Alma Lloyd also does her bit towards making the picture worthwhile.

Many Deserving of Credit . . .

OF THE men in supporting roles, Basil Rathbone, by virtue of the prominence of his part and his complete mastery of it, gives a performance which probably will bring him an Academy award when the year's accomplishments are surveyed. His King Louis is an extraordinary study. C. V. France lends spiritual quality and persuasiveness to his characterization as a priest; and the robust and always competent Henry Wilcoxon is another who scores. I would like to see Wilcoxon in a big part that would permit him to show what an excellent actor he is. Walter Kingsford, one of our most dependable players, lends conviction to his role. Others who make their presence felt are Heather Thatcher, Sidney Toler, Stanley Ridges, Ralph Forbes. The sets designed by Hans Dreier and John Goodman have distinct storytelling value. Dreier, for a long time head of the Paramount art department, always builds for the story and not only to please the eye. The slum sets in *If I Were King*, as built and photographed, have such an air of authenticity that one almost can smell

them; and the royal quarters convey the same conviction of fidelity to their period, credit for which is to be shared by the photography of Theodor Sparkuhl. Edith Head faced a great task in dressing the players in costumes of the period and contributed greatly to the visual wealth of the production.

JOHN BRAHM SCORES AGAIN . . .

● **GIRLS' SCHOOL**; Columbia picture and release; director, John Brahm; producer, Sam Marx; screen play by Tess Slesinger and Richard Sherman; based on Miss Slesinger's original story; photography, Fraz Planer; film editor, Otto Meyer; musical director, Morris Stoloff. Cast: Anne Shirley, Nan Grey, Ralph Bellamy, Dorothy Moore, Gloria Holden, Marjorie Main, Margaret Tallichet, Peggy Moran, Kenneth Howell, Noah Beery, Jr., Cecil Cunningham, Pierre Watkin, Doris Kenyon. Running time, 71 minutes.

MY REVIEW of the second picture John Brahm directed in this country, started off with, "At last a text book on talkie direction." (*Spectator*, February 12, 1938.) The story of that picture, *Penitentiary*, was told almost for its full length, in the drab atmosphere of a prison and dealt with prisoners and prison officials. Now John Brahm swings to the opposite end of the social scale and with equal authority depicts life in a fashionable boarding school for girls. To picture people with an eye for direction, *Girls' School* will prove a sheer delight; to picture patrons everywhere it will prove most engaging entertainment. The screen play, ably written with regard for the kind of direction it was to get, does not follow the screen's standard story formula of two central characters and a theme which concerns only them; rather it is a composite presentation of school life into the pattern of which are woven various slightly related incidents which bring half a dozen characters to the front at intervals. It is Brahm's second text book on talkie direction, and if all pictures were directed as brilliantly, there would be no necessity for the film industry's investment of one million dollars in a hoopla effort to fatten box-offices.

Anne Shirley's Fine Performance . . .

TWO things stand out in Brahm's direction—the good taste he displays throughout and the outstanding performances he develops from a cast composed principally of young people. A feature of the performances is the easy, conversational tone in which dialogue is delivered, a feature all other directors would profit from studying. The whole picture is a succession of brilliant directorial touches, of grouping for visual values and flashes of humor which sprinkle the showing with laughs. Anne Shirley gives a remarkable performance. Her character is a negative one of the only girl among the many who has to work her way through the school's four-year course; a rather drab characterization in monotone, a sharp contrast with the colorful ebullience of the scores of lively youngsters who come from richer homes and are at "That ebullient age when life is letting off its over-charge of laughter," as someone has written. There is no laughter in Anne's life, but

in her characterization is an underlying suggestion of power and purpose which gives her complete command of all her scenes. Instead of suspending her for her refusal to play a part in an unimportant Western picture, RKO should give Anne a bonus for preventing it from committing such a folly.

Nan Grey and Noah, Jr. . . .

OTHER pictures in which Nan Grey has appeared or other directors who have guided her, never revealed her as the accomplished actress she becomes in the hands of Brahm. I cannot recall anything else she has done, but it will take me a long time to forget the forcefulness of her *Girls' School* performance. Dorothy Moore is another girl who registers strongly. Noah Beery, Jr., whose first appearance on the screen the *Spectator* hailed as the beginning of a brilliant career, demonstrates in this picture that there is reason for the prediction, and suggests the lack of wisdom on the part of the producers in taking so long to discover him. Noah plays with Anne Shirley a love scene as tender and sweet as any to the credit of our most experienced Romeos. A fine looking boy, son of an able actor whose talent he has inherited, his assurance of eventual stardom is readily apparent to anyone except a talent scout and the scout's employers. A score or more of the school girls have bits or speeches and each performs her task with as much assurance as that shown by the leading players.

All Hands Deserve Credit . . .

OF THE adults, none dwarfs the others, each fitting into his or her place with too much neatness to suggest acting. Cecil Cunningham is ideal casting as head of the school. Among the faculty members are two of my favorite character women, Gloria Holden and Marjorie Main. The former has the more outstanding part, and in one scene her quick transition from joy to sorrow is done so beautifully the preview audience applauded her warmly. Doris Kenyon, beautiful and charming as ever, is on the screen just long enough to make us regret it is not longer. Margaret Tallichet contributes one clever bit of comedy. Pierre Watkin gives a heart-warming performance as Nan Grey's father, and Ralph Bellamy, always an agreeable addition to a picture cast, bounces gaily into this one and bounces out again quite promptly with Gloria Holden, altar-bound, at his side—one of the entertaining but isolated elements of the story. Tess Slesinger wrote the original play. Sam Marx produced for Columbia. The picture is mounted in a manner which establishes perfect unity between the

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mood of the story and its physical attributes. For this, credit is due Stephen Goosson and Lionel Banks. For developing all the visual possibilities of the production credit is due Franz Planer for fine photography. After the preview I bumped into Morris Stloff, musical director, who assured me there was a half-hour of background music in *Girls' School*. I had not noticed it, which is the greatest tribute I can pay it and its composer, Gregory Stone. When we are conscious of background music there is something the matter with the foreground or the music.

MAKES PLEASANT ENTERTAINMENT . . .

● **YOUTH TAKES A FLING**; Universal; producer, Joe Pasternak; director, Archie Mayo; assistant director, Frank Shaw; screen play, Myles Connolly photographer, Rudolph Maté; art director, Jack Otterson; film editor, Philip Cahn; musical director, Charles Previn; song, Jimmy McHugh and Harold Adamson. Cast: Andrea Leeds, Joel McCrea, Frank Jenks, Dorothea Kent, Isabel Jeans, Virginia Grey, Grant Mitchell, Henry Mollison, Brandon Tynan, Oscar O'Shea, Granville Bates, Roger Davis, Marion Martin, Olaf Hytten, Willie Best. Running times, 78 minutes.

MANY times the *Spectator* has contended that the old one about the play's being the thing does not apply to motion pictures. All any audience looks for is entertainment. *Youth Takes a Fling* is entertaining, but as a screen play it lacks most of the standard ingredients. For instance, it has no villain, the conflict element being the hero's stubbornness in acknowledging to himself that he is in love. From the outset we are left in no doubt about the state of the girl's feelings towards the hero. Andrea Leeds is in love with a dream man when the story opens; she sees the dream realized in the person of Joel McCrea, and the moment her eyes glimpse him, she transfers her love from the dream to the actuality, and thereafter the picture is wholly a depiction of the various devices she resorts to to lure him to the altar. That is all there is to the story, but it makes a nice little story, neatly composed by Myles Connolly, smartly directed by Archie Mayo, adequately presented by that master producer, Joe Pasternak, and, as is usual with Universal pictures, showing some artistically attractive sets designed by Jack Otterson and his associate, Richard Riedel.

Joel McCrea's Best Performance . . .

WITH such a frail story to start with, the picture had to rely chiefly on direction and performances for its entertainment qualities. Both are excellent. Under Archie Mayo's guidance, Joel McCrea gives what appeals to me as the ablest performance of his career as a screen actor. It is a purely mental characterization, one in which physical prowess does not figure. The manner in which he declares his love will give you an idea of both his characterization and his strenuous efforts to ward off the darts of cupid. "Gosh darn it!" he exclaims rebelliously to Andrea, "I'm stuck on you!" The very idea makes him furious. Andrea Leeds is coming along rapidly, her performance in this picture being another step forward. Frank Jenks proves himself an exceedingly

clever comedian. Dorothea Kent and Isabel Jeans handle their roles acceptably, and among the men, Oscar O'Shea, Granville Bates and Henry Mollison contribute considerably to the satisfaction the picture will give. Rudolph Maté is to be credited with some strikingly artistic photography.

ONE OF THE WORST . . .

● **SHARPSHOOTERS**; 20th-Fox picture and release; director, James Tinling; executive producer, Sol M. Wurtzel; screen play by Robert Ellis and Helen Logan; based on an original story by Maurice Rapt and Lester Ziffren; photography, Barney McGill; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Haldane Douglas; set decorations, Thomas Little; film editor, Nick De Maggio; costumes, Herschel; sound, Joseph E. Aiken and William H. Anderson; musical direction, Samuel Kaylin. Cast: Brian Donley, Lynn Bari, Wally Vernon, John King, Douglas Dumbrille, C. Henry Gordon, Sidney Blackmer, Martin Joseph Spellman, Jr., Frank Puglia, Hamilton MacFadden, Romaine Callendar. Running time, 63 minutes.

NEW SREEL cameramen are coming into their own. They have had two screen appearances already, first in Metro's big and poor *Too Hot to Handle*, and now in Century's small and poor *Sharpshooters*. If we are to believe these pictures, ace cameramen must be charming fellows; at least, I presume we are supposed to be charmed with them, for in each picture one of them is the hero, and heroes must charm us to make us applaud their valiant efforts to overcome all the obstacles scripts put in their paths. Metro's ace cameraman is a boastful faker, and Century's a drunken roisterer, a loud-mouthed braggart of whom we get very weary as the film unwinds. One of his prettiest sequences is shot in a night club, where, maudlin with drink, he screams lines which consist of boisterous boasts of his own astuteness in outwitting his competitors. The locale is a mythical kingdom of Europe, and our ace cameraman shows the benighted Europeans just how a regular American fellow acts when he is away from home.

Will Disgrace Its Partners . . .

OUR admiration and respect for newsreel cameramen have been earned by the scenes they have sent us from abroad. The two pictures revealing their conduct and methods, if we are asses enough to take them at their face values, would make us despise them. But no doubt the producers will tell us it is all just good, clean fun; will argue that the disgusting drunk sequence is rare comedy to make us laugh. Some of those in the preview audience did laugh, but to offer such trash is an insult to people with good taste and sufficient national pride to resent the broadcasting of such a characterization as a typical example of an American cameraman at work in a foreign field. The same thing goes for the Metro picture, which, however, is less vulgar than *Sharpshooters*. No fault can be found with Brian Donlevy's skill in giving the director the kind of performance demanded of him. It was his misfortune, as well as that of the other members of the cast, to have been given places in such a vehicle. The best that *Sharpshooters* can do will be to disgrace what-

ever partners it gets on double bills. And it leaves the newsreel cameraman picture yet to be made.

MUCH UNNECESSARY NOISE . . .

● **STRAIGHT, PLACE AND SHOW**; 20th-Fox production and release; stars the Ritz Brothers; director, David Butler; associate producer, David Hempstead; screen play by M. M. Muselman and Allen Rivkin; based on a play by Damon Runyon and Irving Caesar; additional dialogue, Lew Brown; lyrics and music of "With You on My Mind" and "Why Not String Along with Me?" by Lew Brown and Lew Pollack; special material by Sid Kuller, Ray Golden and Jule Styne; dances staged by Nicholas Castle and Geneva Sawyer; photography, Ernest Palmer; art direction, Bernard Herzbrun and Lewis Creber; set decorations, Thomas Little; film editor, Irene Morra; costumes, Gwen Wakeling; musical direction, Louis Silver. Supporting players: Richard Arlen, Ethel Merman, Phyllis Brooks, George Barbier, Sidney Blackmer, Will Stanton, Ivan Lebedeff, Gregory Gaye, Rafael Storm, Stanley Fields, Tiny Roebuck, Ben Welden, Ed Gargan, Pat McKee. Running time, 66 minutes.

MOTION pictures are your noisiest entertainment. The comedy of the Ritz Brothers is purely pantomimic; we laugh at what we see them do, not at what we hear them say. They perhaps are funnier in this picture than they have been in any others, but I cannot advise you to see it, as to get the Ritz comedy you have to take a tremendous amount of quite unnecessary noise. Even at a hunt club dance, Phyllis Brooks and Dick Arlen, whose feet are on the top rung of the social ladder, discuss their romance in tones which must carry to every other couple on the dance floor. If we are to believe what we see—as we must if we are to get satisfactory returns on what we pay to get in—Phyllis and Dick are members of highbrow families, have been reared in the best homes and educated in the best schools; but when we hear them airing their romantic misunderstandings loudly enough to be heard by a ballroom full of people, we must put them down as a couple of vulgar lowbrows. And that is a medium which can carry a whisper to the people in the most distant seats!

It Is Too Hard to Take . . .

MOTION picture stupidity is responsible for a box-office slump which producers are endeavoring to remedy with money while the stupidity which caused it still persists. *Straight, Place and Show* could have been a comedy extremely funny and easy to take, but, as with *Youth Takes a Fling*, its noise makes it too hard to take. It asks us to accept the youthful and wholly feminine Phyllis Brooks as a horse trainer. Next we can expect to have Darryl Zanuck asking us to accept Shirley Temple as a college football halfback. The one redeeming feature of *Straight, Place and Show* is the closing steeplechase sequence which is both thrilling and funny, as well as a tribute to the skill of those in charge of its mechanics; but, even so, it does not compensate for all we have to sit through in the way of unnecessary clamor which precedes it. When producers offer us entertainment which resembles motion pictures, I will review their offerings as such; when they offer us clamor, I will review it as such. As a noise, *Straight,*

Place and Show is a howling success, that is, if you like howls. At a Labor Relations Board hearing Darryl admitted that he is recognized as a most capable cutter. The credits inform us that he was in charge of production of the Ritz Brothers picture. He should have demonstrated his niftiness as a cutter by cutting out a lot of the noise.

EXTREMELY HARD TO TAKE . . .

● **THERE GOES MY HEART**; Hal Roach production for United Artists release; co-stars Fredric March and Virginia Bruce; director, Norman Z. McLeod; producer, Milton H. Bren; screen play by Eddie Moran and Jack Jevne; based on an original idea by Ed Sullivan; photography, Norbert Brodine; photographic effects, Roy Seawright; art direction, Charles D. Hall; musical direction, Marvin Hatley; set decorations, W. L. Stevens; Miss Bruce's gowns by Irene; sound, William Randall and W. B. Delaplain; film editor, William Terhune. Supporting players: Patsy Kelly, Alan Mowbray, Nancy Carroll, Eugene Pallette, Claude Gillingwater, Arthur Lake, Etienne Girardot, Robert Armstrong, Irving Bacon, Irving Pichel, Sid Saylor, J. Farrell MacDonald. Running time, 81 minutes.

WHEN you sit down to dine and find every dish is flavored with something you do not like, there is no use telling you each dish itself is well cooked and tasty and that you should disregard the flavor. It is much the same way with *There Goes My Heart*. It has some good points, but it is flavored with too much noise. The lower register of Patsy Kelly's voice is soothing and musical; her upper register is a squeal. Patsy has more sides than any other member of the cast, and she squeals most of them. In her first sequence her squeals have all the soothing delicacy of a saw when it encounters a nail in a split board. That puts your nerves nicely on edge for Gene Pallette's further treatment. Gene's lower register is a wooly growl not hard to take; his upper register has the musical protest of an indignant saw when it encounters two nails an octave apart, and throughout the picture his upper register carries on. There are other assorted screams, roars and squeals which do their respective bits to make the picture more a test of your nervous resistance than a piece of pleasant entertainment.

Better Look for Another . . .

WHEN pictures were silent you patronized them because of their soothing influence upon nerves frayed by the noises incidental to a day's activities. Therein lay their strength as entertainment, their box-office lure. Wisely used sound added to their appeal because, for the first time in the history of theatrical entertainment, a whisper could be carried to the man in the last row in the top gallery. But picture producers never realized the fact. They have used the sound device largely to make the screen loud, vulgar, blatant, until it has driven audiences from picture houses; and now, instead of making the kind of pictures that will bring the audiences back, the film industry is spending a million dollars in a crazy attempt to make the public think it likes the kind of entertainment it knows it does not like. It simply does not make sense. *There Goes My Heart*

is just another example of its folly, just another nail in the box-office coffin. In addition to the devastating clamour of the dialogue delivery, it chatters incessantly through scenes devoid of story connection. The picture, as I have said, has some good points. A chocolate cake has good points, but you would not enjoy eating it if it were doused with garlic. It would be a waste of time, therefore, to point out the good points. The good points of *There Goes My Heart* are smothered with the garlic of unnecessary noise. Farther along the street, perhaps, you can find a picture easier to take.

STORY OF THE REDWOODS . . .

● **VALLEY OF THE GIANTS;** Warner Brothers, producers; director, William Keighley; story, Peter B. Kyne; screen play, Seton I. Miller and Michael Fessier; photographer, Sol Polito; technicolor photography, Allen B. Davey; color director, Natalie Kalmus; film editor, Jack Killifer; art director, Ted Smith; sound, Oliver S. Garretson; musical director, Leo Forbstein. Cast: Wayne Morris, Claire Trevor, Frank McHugh, Alan Hale, Donald Crisp, Charles Bickford, Jack LaRue, John Littel, Dick Purcell, El Brendel, Russell Simpson, Cy Kendall, Harry Cording, Wade Boteler, Helen MacKellar, Addison Richards. Running time, 80 minutes.

Reviewed by Robert Prescott

THERE are many slight touches and suggestions in *Valley of the Giants* that are quietly prophetic of things to come in the motion picture industry. First, I noticed a new and vitalized undercurrent throughout the stock plot exploits and land pirates robbing the people of their land. Peter B. Kyne, who wrote the original story, has never given much of his time to the social implications of economic oppression, using the theme merely for its age-old dramatic value. However, as rewritten and produced, Director William Keighley has completed a peculiarly satisfying document in which is recorded the struggle, universal in scope, of the people against exploitation. This theme treats of the early days in Northern California when timber cruising pirates were denuding the magnificent stands of redwood.

Writer Is Nostalgic . . .

HAVING been raised in a timber country, I was especially impressed by a really magnificent portrayal of a roving, swashbuckling, tall-talking, lumberjack, played by Alan Hale. Hale is portrayed in a stock role, the defender of right and justice. The role itself is sentimental, and played by anyone but Hale might have suffered by too much mawkish low comedy. However, Hale seems to have caught the personality and feeling of a breed that still exists in the mountains—half wobbler, childish, violent, sentimental to the toenails and lumberjackish in the Olympian style. He enters early in the drama as the chief buck of land pirate Charles Bickford, who, having mowed down middlewestern timber, decides upon California as the next place. Bickford is a bit hairy chested in his role of he-man, and, after all, early western lumbermen were a pretty smooth lot; yet his performance is excellent. Hale parts with him when he finds that honest Wayne Morris and petty landholders in the Valley of the Giants are to be de-

prived of their land in a typical early west land piracy. Hale moves over to the side of justice triumphant, yet he does it with such a roisterous gusto that I found myself completely oblivious of Mr. Peter B. Kyne and his stock manipulations.

Claire Trevor Progresses . . .

THE girl of the gambling halls, another stock role, was gotten away with by Claire Trevor. This young woman has an unusual, non-Hollywood quality of reality that nearly always rises above the mediocrity of the roles assigned to her. She realized and caught and augmented the subtle possibilities in the production and emerged in a performance which showed her instinctive sociological comprehension. She, more than any of the other players, built and exhibited a struggle that is going on in Spain, Czechoslovakia, China and throughout the world where people are fighting for their liberties and their land. Claire Trevor entered the show as a hand-maiden of exploitation, a gambling camp-follower of timber pirates. Her metamorphosis from a stock chippie into a grimly determined believer in the oppressed, evades the pitfalls of moralizing, sentimentality and soup in which a lesser actress would have sunk. Even her eventual love for Wayne Morris is subordinated to the logical necessity of her intellectual right about face—her change from futility to utility. Produced in technicolor, this show has form. It presages an articulation that previous western themes have lacked. It deals with something that directly concerns the American people. Discretely, without vulgar propaganda, it carries the torch for conservation. And it should even satisfy the producers in the box-office.

CUMMINGS SAVES THE DAY . . .

● **TOUCHDOWN, ARMY;** Paramount picture and release; director, Kurt Neumann; associate producer, Edward T. Lowe; original story and screen play by Lloyd Corrigan and Erwin Gelsey; photography, Victor Milner; art direction, Hans Dreier and Earl Hedrick; edited by Arthur Schmidt; sound recording, George Dutton and Richard Olson; interior decorations, A. E. Freudeman; musical direction, Boris Morros. Cast: John Howard, Mary Carlisle, Robert Cummings, William Frawley, Owen Davis, Jr., Benny Baker, Minor Watson, Raymond Hatton. Running time, 60 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

DURING the first few scenes it occurred to me that I could start off my review with a quip, stating that the motion picture industry was underpaying the American public, in as much as \$250,000, divided among so many, was far too little compensation for sitting through pictures like this. And I could have used my quip with thorough justice if Robert Cummings had not popped onto the screen with one of the best comedy performances I have seen this year. Playing scenes which are incomparably better than anything else in the picture, Cummings hits his stride as a screen actor, reveals a wide understanding of human nature and a grasp of how to submerge himself in a character, and generally plays with a sureness, breeziness and subtlety which

would have made his performance a hit in a better production. The picture, however, is just a stereotyped rendition of the old yarn about the conceited and defiant young man who goes to West Point for ulterior reasons, in this case a major's daughter, but turns out to be a right good sort under the discipline and ideals he finds there. Not that this situation could not yet be made into an entertaining film, if it serves as the thread upon which to hang some interesting commentary on the institution. But *Touchdown, Army* is all thread.

Stock Shots Are Many . . .

THE picture is hastily and carelessly produced. What percentage of it is composed of stock shots of the students and their football team I would not venture to guess, but it is large. Photographically these shots range all the way from murky grey to near black. This is not intended as a reflection on Cameraman Victor Milner, who probably had little or nothing to do with the choice of the stock views, and whose scenes are well lighted. The best stretches of screen play writing, done by Lloyd Corrigan and Erwin Gelsey, are fortunately the scenes in which Cummings appears. Or maybe he makes them seem better than they are. Silly dialogue writing is the almost incomprehensibly erudite language employed by the upper classman when they are hazing the plebes. A prize improbability is when one of the characters, with false whiskers and a wig, disguises himself as an old colonel, takes the center of the floor at a party, fooling everybody. The only originality occurs in the scoring of the telling touchdown in the football game, which is accomplished in a spectacular way.

Direction Is Workmanlike . . .

OF THE other leading players, John Howard is sorrowfully miscast as a student, being too mature as a type, especially in a sequence when he is supposed to be a plebe. Mary Carlisle plays with capability the rather transparent role of the major's daughter. Owen Davis, Jr., knows how to speak lines, but he should not pitch his voice so high. Raymond Hatton stands out for his trouping as the make-believe colonel, even though the idea was absurd, and William Frawley, Benny Baker and Minor Watson give good accounts of themselves. Director Kurt Neuman handles his people in a workmanlike way—but it just wasn't in the cards. Anyway, the public will get a good performance for their money—or the motion picture industry's money.

HE ORDERS BUTTERMILK...

● **STARLIGHT OVER TEXAS;** Edward Finney picture for Monogram release; stars Tex Ritter; director, Al Herman; screen play by John Rathmell; based on an original idea by Harry MacPherson; photography, Francis Corby; sound recording, Glen Glenn; film editor, Fred Bain; songs, "Starlight Over Texas," by Harry Tobias and Roy Ingraham; "Ail Viva Tequilal," Al Von Tilzer and Harry MacPherson; "A Garden in Granada," by Sam Lewis, Abel Baer and Ion Vasilescu; "Pickins," by A. J. Brier; "Twilight on the Trail," by Merle

Scobee; musical director, Frank Sanucci. Supporting players: Salvatore Damino, Carmen LaRoux, Rosa Turick, Horace Murphy, Snub Pollard, Karl Hackett, Charles King, Jr., Martin Garralaga, George Chesebro, Carlos Villarias, Edward Cassidy and the Northwesterns, including Merle Scobee, Ray Scobee, Shorty Brier, Buck Rasch and Chuck Davis. Running time, 58 minutes.

Reviewed by Bert Harlen

A WESTERN of above-the-average calibre. Tex Ritter makes his initial appearance as a Monogram star, and a production of considerable color and excitement has been built around him. He brings a pronounced Texas drawl to the screen, an expressive, sometimes fervid, singing style, and an ease and affability which should gain him many friends among the fans of pictures of this sort. *Starlight Over Texas* is generously studded with musical numbers. A fiesta scene, laid on a ranch in old Mexico, is staged with uncommon elaborateness for a Western picture, and a number of Mexican dancers perform with dash and grace. A creditable screen play has been turned out by John Rathmell, based on an original of Harry MacPherson. There are only a few basic plots on which Western stories can be built, and the merit of such a script lies in the fictional embellishments and the by-play of the characters. These touches the present story has. The hero even indulges in some philosophical passages on the seemingly animate nature of guns, a speech handled rather well by Ritter, by the by. An amusing incident is when the hero saunters up to the bar and orders buttermilk, a noncon-

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The Spectator
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A COMPOSER

formity which leads to a challenge and a fight at the hands of one of the toughies present.

Fight Scenes Realistic . . .

DIRECTOR Al Herman has done well by the script, manifesting a particular aptitude for staging fight scenes. In the fracas following the buttermilk ordering, the hero really suffers, gets his head beat painfully against the bar, before he vanquishes his opponent. The cast, among which are numerous Mexican people, including the heroine, is generally satisfactory. The sets have atmosphere, the photography is of good quality, and the editing is better than it usually is in the Monogram endeavors. One scene comes to mind, however, which could be improved with respect to editing—the shot following the close of the fiesta sequence, when a man is shown seated in a chair outside the sheriff's office. At first we think he is a guest at the fiesta. A longer shot, showing the sign on the sheriff's office, or a fade-in on the sign, would eliminate this confusion. Frank Sanucci has given the musical numbers a first-rate musical background, making good use of small combinations, and the Northwesterners, cowboy musical aggregation, contribute some lilting interludes. The film as a whole will hold its own with Westerns coming out of any of the major studios.

ACTION WITHOUT SUSPENSE . . .

● **THE NIGHT HAWK:** Republic production and release; directed by Sidney Salkow; associate producer, Herman Schlom; original screen play by Earl Felton; production manager, Al Wilson; photographed by Jack Marta; supervising editor, Murray Seldeen; film editor, Ernest Nims; art director, John Victor Mackay; musical director, Cy Feuer; song, "Never a Dream Goes By," by Walter Kent, Many Kurtz and Al Sherman; costumes by Irene Saltern. Cast: Robert Livingston, June Travis, Robert Armstrong, Ben Welden, Lucien Littlefield, Joseph Downing, Roland L. Got, Cy Kendall, Paul Fix, Billy Burrud, Charles Wilson, Dwight Frye, Paul McVey, Robert Homans. (Running time, 63 minutes.

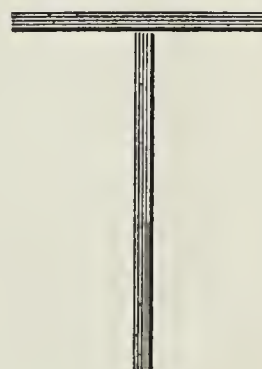
Reviewed by Robert Joseph

WHETHER he knows it or not, Director Sidney Salkow is a freshman in the Alfred Hitchcock School. This in itself is a compliment, for "Hitch" is the outstanding director in the field of action mystery stories. Those who remember *The Thirty-nine Steps* will easily understand what I mean. *Night Hawk*, Director Salkow's first screen effort behind the camera, is a good freshman thesis. He knows the tricks and devices that lift an action story beyond the realm of simple mobility. With a touch here and there he has attempted to create symbolism, unexpected twists, both favorite Hitchcock standbys. His dissolve from the three moneys, no hear, no see, no speak, to a cafe by the same name, is pure Hitchcock. His fast moving action against a background of listless fog and tranquil waves is another. But in one measure the picture merits a C grade—and that is suspense. Nothing in the plot is left to the onlooker's imagination. From the very start we are acquainted with the villain of all the ensuing dire deeds. This Hitch would never have done.

More Cutting . . .

SUPERVISING EDITOR Murray Seldeen and Editor Ernest Nims might have been more lavish with the cutting shears. There were a number of laggy moments and some bare spots. The scene between the nurse and the iron-lung encased kid, for example, needed editing badly. The story, recounting the attempt of a ship news reporter to run to earth the brains of a smuggling outfit, played against a background of fast shooting and high action, has a number of plot novelties to make it absorbing. Screen Writer Earl Felton has fashioned a good melodrama, spiced with plenty of zip. I think a little of the dialogue might have been sacrificed for the sake of increased plot action, however. Associate Producer Herman Schlom has somebody in Robert Livingston, a young man whom I see for the first time. Together with screen veteran Robert Armstrong he carries the picture capably on his shoulders. The newcomer, to me at least, knows what to do before the camera. Ben Welden as the comic heavy deserves a round of applause. I draw the line on the characterization given to Roland Got as Willie, the hero's Chinese factotum. My next week's salary against a Republic commissary chocolate ice streamliner, American born Chinese boys *do not* speak the way Roland does in the current picture, with lots of flowers and twisted idioms in the spirit of Charlie Chan. All in all, *Night Hawk* is a nice little picture that need cause no exhibitor to hide when his customers leave the theatre.

*Best Wishes
to the
Spectator*



GEORGE
MARSHALL

I believe the Spectator's
consistently constructive
and honest policy deserves
support —

EDWARD ARNOLD

Frank McDonald

Director

"FRESHMAN YEAR"

Universal

"FLIRTING WITH FATE"

the Joe E. Brown starrer

for David L. Loew

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